



# An Evaluation of the Da Project

Part of the Springboard Initiative at  
Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project, Ballyfermot, Dublin.

By "Working With Men" on behalf of Barnardos.

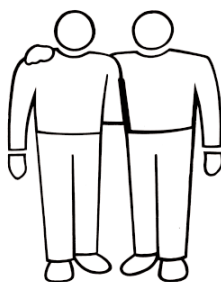


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July 2006



Working With Men

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## Foreword

Children need their fathers. Unfortunately this fact is often not given the attention it deserves when providing family support services.

The Da Project, based within Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project, is an innovative piece of work that aims to increase the participation of fathers in family support services and in their children's lives.

### **The Da Project consisted of the following elements:**

- Training for staff in working with fathers, resulting in an increase of skills and knowledge.
- Consultation with mothers, children and fathers to determine their views about fathers and fathering, and to help identify what fathers needed to become more involved in their children's lives. The consultation process resulted in:
  - change to the project's assessment and referral practices so that fathers were included from the beginning of the project's engagement with a family;
  - provision of a programme of social activities for fathers and for fathers and their children, to engage fathers with the project and to build trust and a rapport between the project staff and fathers;
  - increase in provision of individual support to some fathers through case-work;
  - the promotion of positive images of fathers and fathering by organising a Fathers Day event involving local children to celebrate the role of father figures in their lives through a creative art and writing competition.
- Publication of a Project Evaluation Report and a Practice Learning Tool.

Through these publications, Barnardos is delighted to be able to share this learning with other agencies and professionals working with children and families, in the hope that it can inform their practice too.

### **Many people contributed to the Da Project's success:**

- The fathers who engaged with the project and participated in the evaluation, their children and families, especially the mothers who believed that fathers have an important role to play in their children's lives.
- The staff in Cherry Orchard, who have been very open to having their practice challenged.
- Other agencies involved in providing services in Cherry Orchard and Ballyfermot who have really encouraged and supported our work with fathers.
- Simon Forrest, evaluator from Working With Men, and David Simpson, trainer, who delivered the Working with Fathers training course. Both contributed invaluable insight into working with fathers and made the evaluation and training processes enjoyable experiences for our staff team.
- The Ballyfermot URBAN Initiative, funded by the ERDF, NDP and Dublin City Council, who funded the Da Project. The flexibility and support that Ballyfermot URBAN Initiative gave to the Da Project was instrumental to the learning that took place.
- The Health Service Executive, who support our work on an ongoing basis.

A big thank you to all.

I hope you enjoy reading the evaluation report and accompanying documents and that you get the opportunity to apply it to the lives of the children and families with whom you work.

Suzanne Connolly  
Director of Children's Services  
Barnardos

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

In June 2003, with financial support from the Ballyfermot URBAN Initiative funded by the ERDF, NDP and Dublin City Council, Barnardos set up the Da Project within the Cherry Orchard Family Support Project to engage more fathers with their services.

This evaluation, undertaken by the UK-based charity Working With Men, describes the Da Project's rationale and the policy and practice context in which it was developed and implemented. It also describes the work of the Da Project and how this work impacted on fathers, families, the wider local community and the work of the Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project as a whole. It also includes recommendations on how the Da Project should develop from this point and how other family support projects supported by Barnardos can adopt the learning of the Cherry Orchard Family Support Project in order to reach out to and engage effectively with more fathers.

## What we did

### In this evaluation we set out to:

- assess the Da Project's impact on the fathers it works with and the mothers of their children and their children;
- document the Da Project's implementation;
- set the work in the context of a review of the relevant public policy practice literature.

### To achieve these aims we:

- reviewed public policy relating to fathers and the family and literature relating to good practice in working with fathers;
- helped the Da Project set up a consultation exercise with mothers and children in the Cherry Orchard community to establish their views on the role and needs of fathers;
- interviewed fathers as they engaged with the Da Project and, where possible, again after they had had some involvement with it, in order to assess their views of it and see if and how it was helping them;
- interviewed family members about their perceptions of the work and how it was affecting family relationships;
- surveyed or conducted interviews with members of the project advisory group, the trainer who supported the development of the project through training project staff, the project funder, and local organisations which had contact with the Da Project.

## What we found

### Why is it important to work with fathers?

Research consistently shows that children can benefit from the active involvement of fathers in their care and upbringing. A good relationship between fathers and their children, particularly in their early and pre-teenage years, is associated with a range of social, educational and psychological benefits. For example, research has shown that when fathers are positively involved in their children's upbringing and care their social skills are enhanced, they experience fewer emotional and behavioural difficulties in adolescence, their achievement at school improves and they have a lower likelihood of getting into trouble with the law<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>. However, we also know that factors such as an increase in family breakdown and parental separation, as well as patterns of employment and work, mean that for many men the opportunities to achieve greater positive involvement with their children can be limited<sup>5</sup>.

Public policy makers in Ireland are beginning to acknowledge the potential benefits to children that can arise from fathers' greater positive involvement with them and to address some of the difficulties they face in achieving this. There is also a growing recognition that family support and other welfare services can play an important role in helping to support fathers as parents<sup>6</sup>. However, family policy is still in the relatively early stages of development in supporting fathers while mothers remain the focus and are still the main beneficiaries of financial and welfare support. Despite well-intentioned attempts to develop a more family friendly policy on work and welfare structures through the 1990s to help both fathers and mothers achieve greater family involvement, it is mothers who have benefited the most<sup>5,7</sup>.

Work with fathers seems to be at an early stage in Ireland, although there are a few networks which support work with men and organisations that lobby for an equalisation of the paternity rights of unmarried and married fathers and for separated fathers to have greater access to or custody of their children<sup>8,9</sup>. An evaluation of family support services provided through the Springboard Initiative shows most of these projects work almost exclusively with mothers and children and only one in 10 of the parents that they had contact with between 2000 and 2001 were fathers<sup>10</sup>. While some research undertaken since this evaluation has shown that a few family support projects have made a start on trying to engage with fathers, most are not confident or skilled around working with them. In some cases, workers still think of fathers mainly in terms of the threat they might pose to children and family welfare. For their part, fathers, who are already reluctant to use services, have tended to see family support projects as providing for mothers and children and not fathers and, in some cases, are viewed as 'anti-men'<sup>11</sup>.

### **What works with fathers?**

There is a growing body of literature describing what works with fathers and the obstacles faced by projects that set out involve them<sup>12,13,14</sup>. This suggests projects are successful when they:

- approach fathers positively, emphasising the benefits, to children, the fathers themselves and mothers, of paternal involvement in parenting and family life;
- have a clarity of purpose to which the fathers can relate;
- are creative about recruitment strategies and targeting using community settings, media with which men engage and support and encourage their partners (who do tend to be in touch with agencies) to 'lean on' fathers to access them;
- understand fathers' needs and motives for engagement with projects, particularly those which arise from social pressures and personal motivations to be more actively involved in parenting;
- are staffed by a knowledgeable, well-trained, committed and motivated workforce. Evidence suggests that although the presence of men in this workforce may have some advantages, a worker's attributes and skills are more important than gender.

The literature has also identified particular problems that projects might have to overcome in order to work with fathers, including:

- difficulty contacting and engaging fathers, which often takes as long and requires as much energy and commitment as any subsequent intervention;
- problems with receiving inappropriate referrals from other agencies because of the dearth of projects targeting fathers;
- conflicts and tensions within agencies arising, because the focus on fathers may be perceived as too positive and supportive and detracting from other work (especially with mothers).

### **The Da Project: what it involved**

The Da Project emerged from a recognition that Springboard Initiative family support projects have little engagement with fathers, and that doing so is important in order to give children the opportunity to access the benefits associated with increased paternal involvement and better parental relationships.

The Da Project involved a range of activities to enable Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project to begin to contact and engage with fathers of families attached to the project. The project worked with families and with fathers directly in order to develop their understanding, make contact and engage with fathers to lay the foundations for on-going, in-depth support work and to develop families and fathers' understanding of the importance of fathers in children's lives. The project also promoted positive images of fathers and fathering within the local community and with other organisations to create a supportive climate for the work with families and fathers.

The Da Project has seven main elements:

- All Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff received training on working with fathers from an experienced external trainer;
- Project staff worked with the evaluator on a series of consultations with mothers, children and fathers to determine their views on fathers and fathering and to help identify fathers' needs in achieving greater involvement with their children;
- The project changed some organisational practices for assessment and referral so that fathers were included from the start of project engagement with families;
- Project staff profiled fathers in the families they worked with to identify potential recruits to the Da Project and contacted them and their families;
- The project provided a rolling programme of social activities for fathers and for fathers and their children to engage and build trust and rapport with fathers;
- Project staff began to provide individual support to some fathers on a 'deeper' level through casework;
- The project promoted positive images of fathers and fathering by organising a Fathers' Day event where children celebrated the role of father-figures in their lives through a creative art and writing competition, and collated a selection of the entries into a calendar which was then distributed to local schools, agencies and across the Cherry Orchard community.

## The Da Project: what it achieved

The Da Project was set up to engage more fathers with Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project. This evaluation showed that the Da Project achieved the following:

- Raised awareness of the importance of fathers and father figures to children;
- Discussion and debate have been stimulated about the role of fathers in the care and upbringing of the children in the mass media;
- Practice in talking about fathers and fathering within local schools has been stimulated;
- Awareness of the importance of fathers to family support work has been raised with other agencies.

This data suggests that, through the Da Project, Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project has made progress towards engaging with fathers and has begun to deliver in-depth case-work and support to about a third of all the fathers in families connected with the project.

However, work is still at an early stage with half of all the fathers in families connected with the project still to be engaged. At this point the Da Project has not fully achieved its aim of developing programmes of work with fathers, but has laid the basis on which this can be developed.

The focus of the work so far has been on:

- training Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff so they are more aware of the potential benefits to children when fathers are more involved with them and staff have developed positive attitudes towards fathers and increased confidence in engaging with them;
- implementing a social activities programme for fathers and fathers and children to connect fathers with the project and provide the basis for forming working relationships with project workers;
- taking opportunities presented through this contact between fathers and project workers to respond to fathers' immediate concerns and needs;
- promoting positive images of fathers and fathering in the local community in order to raise awareness of the project and create a positive climate in which this work can take place.

The fact that the project is at an early stage is reflected in the impact it has had on fathers and families. This evaluation has identified that the Da Project has resulted in the following:

- the quality of contact between children and their fathers in at least nine families connected with the Da Project has improved;
- at least six fathers feel their attitude towards welfare and support services has been altered through their contact with the project;
- at least five fathers have received practical support in liaising with other agencies.

## The next steps

On the basis of these findings the focus of activity over the next year should fall on sustaining the momentum generated and developing the work to a point where engagement is achieved with all fathers who can be contacted, and who are assessed to be eligible. Work should also continue to develop focused, in-depth support for those already trying to improve their relationships with their children and their families.

To meet these aims it is recommended that Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project set a target for achieving engagement with all the fathers connected with families accessing the project who can be contacted, and who are assessed to be eligible.

**It is also recommended that it continue to develop its work with those fathers it has engaged with by:**

- adopting a framework for assessing fathers' needs, which focuses on identifying the support they require to play a positive role in the lives of their children;
- ensuring that effective monitoring and evaluation processes are put in place so that the outcomes for fathers and families are assessed;
- identifying a worker with responsibility for leading the work.

In addition, further work should be undertaken with the local community. This should include the provision of feedback, in an appropriate form, on the findings of this evaluation to relevant local organisations, agencies and individuals, with the aim of continuing to promote a father inclusive approach within the community.

This evaluation has highlighted important learning points for family support services trying to develop their provision so that it is more inclusive of fathers. A secondary aim should be to disseminate this learning to other family support projects provided by Barnardos so they may move to a position where they positively engage with more fathers and have laid the foundations for the provision of more focused, in-depth support.

Underpinning this work is the recognition that family support projects have a low starting point in terms of their engagement with, and accessibility and acceptability to, fathers and there may need to be a disproportionately high level of investment in order to reach a position where programmes of support and in-depth case-work with fathers can be developed and implemented. In addition, because the processes involved in moving from this low starting point are developmental, project funders, managers and workers need to be prepared to be flexible about what the work will involve.

To meet the aim of bringing all Springboard Initiative family support projects provided by Barnardos to a point where they develop programmes of in-depth work with fathers it is recommended that:

- The findings of this evaluation are disseminated to all Barnardos family support projects;
- Referral and assessment mechanisms used by all projects are reviewed and revised to ensure that information on the father(s) of the children in the family, their residency status and level of involvement in their children's lives is systematically gathered with each new referral;
- Targets are established for all projects to improve the 'father-friendliness' of their provision;
- That they are supported in doing this through the provision of a resource which describes the steps involved in improving their appeal and accessibility to men;
- That all Barnardos family support projects are encouraged to engage in an activity with their local community celebrating Fathers' Day 2007/2008.

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## Introduction

Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project was established under the Springboard Initiative of the Department of Health and Children in 1998. The National Evaluation of the Springboard Initiative identified increasing the level of engagement with fathers as a continuing challenge for Springboard Projects nationally.

In response to this challenge and with the support of the Ballyfermot URBAN Initiative, funded by the ERDF, NDP and Dublin City Council, Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project set out to explore more effective ways of engaging with fathers.

This report outlines the increasing awareness of the benefits fathers bring to their children's lives both in Ireland and internationally and tells the story of the project's journey. The report identifies the outcomes achieved through this process. It makes recommendations on the future development of the project's work with fathers as well as on the dissemination of the project's learning.

## Background

In recent years there has been a rapid growth of interest in and attention paid to the positive roles fathers play in family life. This has included widening recognition that children can benefit from their fathers' active involvement in their care and upbringing. Research has shown that a good relationship between fathers and their children, particularly in their early and pre-teenage years, is associated with a range of social, educational and psychological benefits. For example, the children of actively involved fathers benefit from enhanced social skills, they experience fewer emotional and behavioural difficulties in adolescence, their achievement at school improves and they have a lower likelihood of getting in trouble with the law <sup>1,2,3,4,5,6,7</sup>.

While many fathers recognise that their active participation in caring for and raising their children has benefits for their children and they want to be more involved as parents, achieving it is not straightforward. Some fathers lack confidence in their skills to parent, especially with infants and young children. Traditional attitudes and beliefs within families and among professionals about the roles that mothers and fathers play in child-raising can discourage or even obstruct fathers' involvement. They may be reluctant to seek help and advice and services that could support them are not always readily available or accessible. In addition, the practical demands of work and changes in family forms and structures, especially parental separation and divorce, can all play a part in making it difficult for some men to achieve greater levels of involvement with their children <sup>8,9,10,11,12</sup>.

## Policy context

Assumptions about what the family comprises and the roles of men and women have come under sustained pressure in recent years. In Ireland, changes in family structures, attempts to achieve legal recognition for non-traditional partnerships and families, changes in the legal status of separated couples and lobbying for a degree of recognition of the rights unmarried fathers have all destabilised traditional views of the family. However, the married couple parenting their biological children remains the most common form of family structure in Ireland and central in the orientation and development of constitutional, legal and public policy development <sup>13,14,15,16,17</sup>.

Within the Irish Constitution the family is conceived of as a married couple in which the mother plays the role of the homemaker and the father is, by implication, the financial provider. Support for fathers' active involvement in raising and caring for children is further marginalised by the lack of paternity rights automatically granted to unmarried fathers and, in cases of family breakdown, the tendency to grant mothers custody of children and place an expectation on fathers to provide financially through the payment of maintenance <sup>18</sup>.

This view of the distinction between the roles of mothers and fathers and the lack of incentive to fathers to be more involved in the nurture and care of their children strongly informed the development of family policy within Ireland up until the mid-1990s. In this period, the main focus fell on the development and consolidation of provision of a range of child and maternity benefits and tax allowances framed within the twin objectives of helping families cover the costs of having children and maintaining a family unit founded on marriage. It has been observed that the underlying principle of family policy up to this point was the endorsement of, 'a full-time homemaker role for women with the man as the sole provider for the family ie it supported the male breadwinner role'<sup>19</sup>.

The publication of the Report of the Commission on the family, established in 1996, is regarded as a watershed in family policy. Although the focus was on promoting women's access to the labour market for economic reasons the report had a number of important implications for the position of fathers within families and their opportunities to be more involved with their children<sup>20</sup>. The commission's work resulted in a raft of legislation the thrust of which expanded the scope and amount of financial support made available to families in the form of child benefits and benefits to carers, and tried to reconcile family life with the increasing demands of the employment market. Alongside these financial incentives, a range of counselling and support services was developed to support families, particularly those living in disadvantaged areas and experiencing relationship difficulties and marriage breakdown.

Despite the attempt to create a more 'family-friendly' climate through these developments in policy and provision, they were in practice more accessible to and influential on mothers than fathers. For example, while maternity benefits increased, fathers' ability to access paternity leave (to which they became entitled) remains severely curtailed by the absence of any obligation on employers to pay them during this period of leave from work. Similarly, family-friendly employment measures such as the introduction of flexible working and job-sharing were well-intentioned but reflected a greater concern with promoting mothers' equity in the workplace than enabling fathers to be involved in the home. Because they failed to take account of fathers' attitudes towards their careers and the traditions and needs and resources within families, they have tended to have more impact on mothers than on fathers<sup>21,8</sup>.

Despite the limited impact of public policy on fathers' involvement in the home, responses to recent practice development and research suggest that politicians are beginning to recognise that supporting families means supporting not just mothers and children but addressing the needs and interests of fathers<sup>22,23,24</sup>. The identification of positive relationships between parents and between parents and children as predictive of the children's well-being, the significance of parental conflict and instability as a negative influence on psychological and behavioural development and the link between household income and educational outcomes all suggest that policy development needs to be equally sensitive to the potential parenting roles played by men. This shift is reflected in recent ministerial pronouncements following the publication of a report with specific focus on the role of fathers in the family suggesting that a more active and positive engagement with fatherhood issues may be informing future policy development<sup>25</sup>.

## Practice context

A great deal is known, especially from work in the UK, United States and Australasia, about how to enable fathers to be more actively involved parents<sup>26,9,27,28,29</sup>. Moreover, the research and practice literature on working with men in general creates a theoretical context for father-focused practice and identified some characteristics associated with successful intervention with men<sup>30,31,32,33,34,35,36,37,38,39</sup>.

This literature reveals a broad consensus on a range of structural, organisational, attitudinal and practical issues involved in working with fathers. These include:

### Barriers faced in engaging with fathers

- Professionals' anxieties about approaching and engaging fathers because they lack confidence, feel unskilled and unsupported;
- The relatively low priority attached to working with fathers especially in services that traditionally have focused on working with mothers and children;
- A perception that working with fathers will either detract from or conflict with work with mothers and children, especially in the context of relationships which have broken down and concerns about exposing women and children to the risk of domestic violence and abuse;
- Concern about organisational capacity and the professionals' workloads;
- Organisational practices and procedures that unintentionally exclude fathers;
- Fathers' difficulties with and reluctance to access services which may be perceived as unwelcoming or inappropriate environments for men, which operate at inappropriate times and in inappropriate locations and are not clear about what they offer to them;
- The negative influence of constructions of masculinities and male identities which can lead men to hide or repress their needs and see using services as a sign of weakness or failure;
- An overly simplistic conceptualisation of the 'problem' of engaging and working with fathers, perceiving it as either associated with men's reluctance to use services or inadequate service provision rather than a combination of both compounded by an under-developed picture of what a father's role is and what his motivations for engagement with services and support are.

### Characteristics of successful engagement with fathers

- Approaching fathers positively, emphasising the benefits to children of greater paternal involvement in parenting and family life<sup>40</sup>;
- Being clear about the purpose of the work and ensuring that fathers can relate to it and see how it is connected with their needs. For example, offering advice about legal processes to fathers involved in divorce and contact issues, support and contact with other fathers looking after children for men with a childcare responsibility, and a place where young fathers can meet together to enjoy mutual support<sup>41,42</sup>;
- Developing creative strategies for making contact with and engaging fathers. This has involved using community settings and media with which fathers engage and offering social activities as a means of making contact with fathers and building a sense of rapport and trust in order to be able to move on to 'deeper' work;

- Understanding fathers' needs and motives for engagement with projects particularly those which arise from social pressures and personal motivations to be more actively involved in parenting. These generally constellate around wanting to be a better father and/or wanting help with a specific difficulty <sup>28,25</sup>;
- Recognising that fathers may be most responsive to support at times of specific need or because they are facing a crisis in their own or their family lives<sup>31,44</sup>;
- Working in ways that appeal to men, being concrete, practical, clear about expectations and the anticipated outcomes of a piece of work;
- Being flexible in working practices and methods and responding to fathers' needs and circumstances. This means not only ensuring services are available at times and in places where fathers can access them, but that the style and format of work relates to the purpose of the intervention and the needs of the father involved<sup>26</sup>;
- Creating 'father-friendly' environments within services and promoting the inclusion of fathers by consulting them on service delivery and making sure they are included in mailings, correspondence and so on<sup>45</sup>;
- Being solution rather than problem oriented;
- Accepting that men want to be better fathers and that they want the best for their children;
- Staffing projects and services with a knowledgeable, well-trained, committed and motivated workforce. Evidence seems to suggest that although the presence of men in this workforce appears to have benefits the attributes and skills of staff are more important than their gender;
- Acknowledging that staff may have to demonstrate they are distancing themselves from and challenging 'father-negative' assumptions and expectations which may be associated with the organisational context in which they are working<sup>12,46</sup>;
- The robust support and commitment of management and across the organisation to working with men;
- Targeting specific groups or kinds of fathers and/or enabling specific groups to emerge through practice and developing appropriate forms of support for them;
- Acknowledging that different activities appeal to different fathers at different times.

Work with fathers seems to be at a very early stage in Ireland although a few networks support work with men (which may of course include fathers even if they are not specifically targeted) and organisations lobby for an equalisation of the paternity rights of unmarried and married men and for separated fathers to have greater access to or custody of their children <sup>47,48,49</sup>.

Mainstream services' engagement with fathers seems, if anything, to be at an even earlier stage of development. An evaluation of family support services provided through the Springboard Initiative showed that most of these projects work almost exclusively with mothers and children. In fact, of the 207 families worked with intensively between January 2000 and May 2001 only one in 10 of the parents they had contact with were fathers and of the 14 families which benefited most from family support interventions during this period only one was not headed by a single mother<sup>50</sup>.

Research undertaken more recently suggests that a few family support projects have begun trying to engage with fathers since 2001 but that, in the main, staff are neither confident or skilled working with men. This study also showed that in some contexts, especially where work with fathers is approached by an organisation or agency whose prime concern is with child-welfare and child-protection issues, staff tend to think of fathers mainly in terms of the threat they might pose to children and family welfare. The combination of these attitudinal obstacles to seeing fathers and work with them in a positive light and the failure of organisations to actively challenge a preconception among staff and fathers that parenting is primarily a mother's responsibility severely hampers the development of practice. It has contributed to fathers' reluctance to use services they see as largely providing for mothers and children, and in some cases, as 'anti-men'<sup>128,12</sup>.

Despite this recent research suggests that promising practice is developing. This seems to be diverse in content and the context in which it takes place but shares a common goal which has been termed, 'calling men into responsibility around parenthood'<sup>12</sup>. This work is characterised as involving processes within which the strengths of fathers and the benefits they can bring to families are acknowledged but which also seeks to challenge and enable them to assume their parental responsibilities. The work engages with issues about masculine identities and is closely oriented around fathers' needs.

Emerging practice in working with fathers in family support services largely confirms the findings of previous research and practice reviews although it adds to it identifying the particular attention required to challenge organisational cultures and practices and staff attitudes in the context of family support and social services where men have tended to be thought of primarily as 'threats' and 'risks' to children and families. The following issues must be addressed as part of the process of changing organisational culture and practice:

- Staff members' personal biographies;
- Their constructions of gender and assumptions about gender differences between women and men;
- Their own experiences of being parented and parenting;
- The influences of their professional training on their attitudes and confidence about engaging and working with fathers.

## Summary: The context for working with fathers

Research has consistently shown that children can benefit from the active involvement of fathers in their care and upbringing. When fathers are positively involved children's social skills are enhanced, they experience fewer emotional and behavioural difficulties in adolescence, their achievement at school improves and they have a lower likelihood of getting in trouble with the law.

Most fathers want to achieve a greater level of involvement with their children but family breakdown and parental separation, patterns of work and the limited support on offer through services can all limit their opportunities to do so.

Although public policy makers in Ireland are beginning to acknowledge the potential benefits to children that can arise from fathers' greater positive involvement with them and the role that family support and other services can play in helping to support fathers they are still treated in the Constitution and through the law as though their primary role and responsibility is that of financial provider. Mothers remain the primary focus of and are still the main beneficiaries of state financial and welfare support. Attempts to develop more family-friendly policy on work and welfare structures have been of more benefit to mothers than fathers.

Work with fathers seems to be at an early stage in Ireland. There are few networks which support work with men and organisations which lobby for a variety of paternal rights. There is almost no tradition of working with fathers in family support and although a few projects have begun trying to engage with them most are not confident or skilled, and, in some cases, staff still think of fathers mainly in terms of the threat they might pose to children and family welfare. For their part fathers, who are already reluctant to use services, have tended to see family support projects as providing for mothers and children and not fathers and, in some cases, as 'anti-men'.

While the pool of expertise and experience in working with men in Ireland seems fairly small, substantial practice and research have been undertaken elsewhere which provide a guide to the characteristics of good practice in working with fathers. This includes:

- Approaching fathers positively and emphasising the benefits to children of greater paternal involvement in parenting and family life;
- Being clear about the purpose of the work and ensuring that it is one to which fathers can relate;
- Being creative about strategies for contacting and engaging fathers and targeting them using community settings, media with which they engage and encouraging their partners (who do tend to be in touch with agencies) to 'lean on' them to access services and support;
- Understanding fathers' needs and motives for engagement with projects particularly those which arise from social pressures and personal motivations to be more actively involved in parenting;
- Being staffed by a knowledgeable, well-trained, committed and motivated workforce. Evidence seems to suggest that although the presence of men in this workforce may have benefits the characteristics and skills of staff are much more important than their gender.

# The Evaluation

## Aims and structure

In July 2004 Barnardos formally contracted Working With Men (WWM) to evaluate the Da Project, based within Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project, Ballyfermot, Dublin. The evaluation reported on The Da Project activities between September 2004 and December 2005 to:

- Assess the project's impact on the fathers it works with and the mothers of their children and their children;
- Document the Da Project's implementation;
- Set the work in the context of a review of the relevant public policy practice literature.

To achieve these aims the evaluation involved the following activities:

- An examination and review of the literature relating to good and promising practice in working with fathers with a focus on work conducted since 1995 and available in English;
- An examination and review of the public policy context with a specific focus on domestic Irish policy relating to the family, parenting and the role and status of fathers;
- An examination of relevant Barnardos policies and practices, records and reports;
- Undertaking participant observation of events and meetings with fathers engaged with the project;
- Face-to-face interviews with fathers and mothers engaged with Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project;
- Group activities and discussions with children engaged with the project;
- Group discussions with mothers previously connected to the project and young mothers living in the locality;
- A series of face-to-face and phone interviews with Barnardos staff working at Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project;
- Phone interviews with the trainer providing the training interventions to the project;
- Face-to-face and phone interviews with members of the Da Project advisory group;
- Participation in a training/project review with Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project;
- Phone interviews with external agencies involved in the implementation or delivery of Da Project activities, including local primary schools and the project funder;
- An analysis of data obtained through all the above activities and compilation of evaluation reports.

## Methods and methodology

Interviews were the principal means of data collection for this evaluation since they are more appropriate than, for example, questionnaire surveys to generate data which help us to understand the factors and processes involved in the development of the work and how these related to its outcomes. In addition, it was anticipated that the production of qualitative data would complement the existing procedures put in place within Barnardos family support projects for monitoring and recording quantifiable aspects of the work such as the number and frequency of client contacts.

With these considerations in mind interviews were conducted with men engaged with the Da Project according to a fairly loose schedule of questions to facilitate elucidation and elaboration on:

- Their current family circumstances and experiences of parenthood;
- Their motives for engagement with the project;
- Their experiences of engagement with the Da Project and Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff;
- Their experiences of project-related interventions and activities;
- Their perceptions of the quality and usefulness of support provided to them;
- Their impressions of its influence on their attitudes, behaviour, relationships, confidence and self-esteem;
- Any needs and concerns which emerged as a consequence of their engagement with the project.

Where possible, fathers were interviewed twice. The first interviews took place at around the time they were engaged with the Da Project and the second towards the end of the period in which the evaluation took place. In some cases fathers were interviewed more often. In other cases they were interviewed only once due to a range of factors. In general, because of time constraints it was much easier to re-interview fathers engaged early in the lifespan of the evaluation than fathers engaged towards its end. In addition, some fathers were unable to provide more than one interview for circumstantial reasons, being either out of contact with the project or unable or unwilling to attend interviews when they were arranged. Overall, the level of contact with fathers achieved through the evaluation paralleled their level of contact with the project as a whole.

All interviews were conducted with a member of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff on hand and in two cases their presence meant the evaluation interview also provided an opportunity for individual casework to take place. In both instances, the fathers had pressing concerns and we decided that ethically it would be inappropriate not to respond. From an evaluative perspective these encounters provided an opportunity to learn more about fathers' needs and concerns and also to observe interaction between the fathers and Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff.

Interviews with fathers took place in many contexts, in the main as discrete interventions organised by Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project, but also as part of social activities organised by the Da Project. Interview locations were diverse. Several fathers were interviewed in Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project, one man at the home of his ex-partner, where he was baby-sitting, another in a pub restaurant and the third in prison.

In all, the evaluation included 12 interviews with seven fathers. Of these two fathers were interviewed three times, one father twice and four others once each.

We also conducted six interviews with five of the female partners/ex-partners of these men. These interviews were closely configured around specific family issues, needs and experiences with a focus on their views and experiences of their relationships with the partners/ex-partners and their roles as fathers to their children and perceptions of the benefits from engagement with the Da Project. Within these broad interests the interviews with mothers followed a similarly loosely constructed schedule as those undertaken with fathers, their direction and content again being highly determined by their individual experiences. These interviews took place both in Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project and in the mothers' homes.

We also held two group discussions with children and young people. One group comprised four boys aged 10–12 years and the other four girls and two boys aged seven to 10 years. All children were members of the families involved in the Da Project although not necessarily children of the men who interviewed as part of this evaluation. These discussions were informal. They involved drawing pictures, brainstorming and discussion based on a variety of stimulus material. Activities were designed to elicit information about children's views of the roles played by fathers and important male figures in their lives and, especially with the boys, the characteristics and qualities they associated with father figures and their aspirations and expectations of themselves as fathers. Both these group interviews took place in Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project and as part of a programme of weekly issue-based group work programmes that the children attended.

We also interviewed 10 other women living in the locality in two groups. These group interviews were more general and less personal and focused on exploring women's views about fathers and fathering in the context of local traditions and cultures. One group comprised seven young mothers aged 17-24 years attending educational courses provided at the local Equine Centre. The other three women were in their 30s and had links with Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project through past or on-going casework involving them and their families.

Staff at Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project were interviewed formally in July and August 2004 and then again in October 2005. In between, informal interviews were conducted, usually in small groups, with a focus on capturing descriptions of activity and also reflections on project development and thinking in relation to specific casework activities. Initial interviews with staff were closely structured around their expectations of the work, their views on potential difficulties and challenges that they might encounter. Evaluative comments were elicited about the training, or stimulating reflection on its influence on their thinking about the planning, potential implementation of the project and views about the anticipated and hoped-for outcomes of the Da Project.

The evaluator also participated in a second staff training event, in autumn 2005, and was actively involved in a process of review and reflection on the development of the Da Project undertaken by Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support staff and Barnardos management. This event involved identifying the learning about practice acquired through the Da Project, hopes and expectations (and to some extent concerns) fulfilled or not fulfilled, and charting the project's 'story'. Importantly, this review also helped to frame identification of the work's future desired trajectory and challenges and opportunities which the staff team wanted to address relating to specific casework activity and structural elements of the project.

The project trainer was interviewed formally after the delivery of the initial Da Project training programme in July 2004. This interview focused on the trainer's experiences of working with the group. We also gathered information about what the training programme comprised, the trainer's impressions of the group's engagement, interests, needs and his response to these and his prognosis for the project following the delivery of this training. The trainer also contributed to the project review exercise held in October 2005.

Members of the Da Project advisory group were surveyed using a self-completion questionnaire in August 2004 and two members were later interviewed face-to-face. Both the survey and interviews focused on their perceptions of the role, function and potential contribution of the advisory group to the Da Project, their perceptions of the rationale for the work and the issues facing fathers in Cherry Orchard and their views on what the project might achieve.

Representatives of other agencies with links to the project were interviewed over the phone in November and December 2005 to assess the impact of project activities on the wider community and their perspective on its implementation and operations. From a list of contacts generated by Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project nine agencies involved in some dimension of Da Project activity were approached and interviews secured with representatives of local schools which participated in a Fathers' Day competition initiated by the Da Project, representatives of the organisations which supported and hosted the exhibition associated with the Fathers' Day competition and a representative of the Da Project funding agency, the Ballyfermot URBAN Initiative. These contributors were asked to describe their involvement with the Da Project, any impact this involvement had on their organisation, and/or any other outcomes they had observed, and any ways in which it influenced their practice or thinking about fathers and fathering.

All interviews were recorded to tape except where this was impractical, for example, on the occasions where interviews took place in noisy environments. Immediately after interviews the evaluator compiled supplementary field notes describing the context and impressions of the interview.

## Data analysis and presentation

The data analysis had three principal dimensions. Data from interviews with fathers and members of their family were scrutinised in relation to the project's objectives, principally to chart the course and nature of engagement with the work and to identify its effects and impact. While data generated through interviews with the fathers and family members were the primary source for this analysis it was also supplemented with information gleaned from the contributions of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff which often provided a strong sense of the overall history, context and trajectory of family involvement with the project.

These data, and also those derived from other interviews, were also scrutinised for information about broader contextual issues such as local attitudes towards and views on fathers and about local community and cultural traditions around work, family and parenting.

The final dimension to data analysis focused on generating an account of the development and implementation of the Da Project and identification of significant factors which determined the course of this process. This analysis focused primarily on descriptive interview material from Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff.

In all cases the process of data analysis was characterised by a combination of a 'grounded' approach to identifying thematic continuities and discontinuities through and across data sources inflected by an awareness of the concepts and hypotheses enshrined in the research, evaluative and reflective literature around working with fathers in particular and men in general.

Findings are presented here in two main forms. They provide the basis for the commentary on the project compiled by the evaluator and they also figure in the form of direct quotations and citations from interviews and other data sources used to qualify and illustrate this commentary.

## Ethical issues

This evaluation was conducted in accordance with the British Sociological Association's guidelines on social research, relevant Working With Men and Barnardos' policies with particular reference to health and safety and child protection. All participants were made aware of how their contribution would be used and were informed of their right to withdraw personal data from it.

To reduce the risk of compromising the ethical standards the evaluation aimed for, and revealing the identity of contributors, we have not presented detailed case studies or used names of fathers, families or staff.

## Evaluator and evaluation agency

This evaluation was conducted by Simon Forrest for Working With Men, under the supervision of Trefor Lloyd, the organisation director, to a detailed specification submitted in response to an invitation to tender for the work. WWM is a UK-based registered charity (No: 1102451) and a company limited by guarantee (No: 3443520) with considerable experience and expertise in the evaluation of small-scale work with fathers alongside programme and resource development and consultancy. Further information about WWM and the organisation's activities can be obtained from Working With Men at 320 Commercial Way, Peckham, London SE15 1QN or via the website at [www.workingwithmen.org](http://www.workingwithmen.org).

## Summary: Evaluation of the Da Project

This evaluation of the Da Project was conducted by Working With Men, a UK-based charity involved in developing practice and projects, resources and research focusing on men. It set out to:

- Assess the project's impact on the fathers it works with and the mothers and their children;
- Document the implementation of the project;
- Set the work in the context of a review of the relevant public policy practice literature.

To achieve these aims we reviewed the relevant policy and practice literature and used this as a context in which to set an evaluation of the project which involved scrutinising relevant project documentation, interviewing fathers and families about their views and experiences of family life and fathers and fathering and their perceptions of how engaging with the project had affected them, interviewing staff and other professionals connected with the project about their experiences of implementing the work and perceptions of its outcomes.

# The Da Project

## Background

Barnardos is Ireland's leading children's charity working with around 5,000 children and families throughout Ireland each year. Barnardos provides a range of services to families, mothers, fathers, carers and children. These include representing children in family law proceedings, bereavement counselling including a free telephone helpline, advice and information about adoption, help with family tracing and accessing records, a National Children's Resource Centre offering access to training, information and publications and family support services provided through a range of community-based projects including projects under the Springboard Initiative. Barnardos also raises issues through an advocacy programme with a focus on policy relating to child poverty, educational disadvantage, child protection and the effect of alcohol abuse in the family on children.

Barnardos manages Cherry Orchard Family Support Project as part of the Springboard Initiative of the Department of Health and Children. The Springboard Initiative is a family support initiative to improve the well-being of families, parents and children and to improve the organisation and delivery of services generally. As a family support service as defined within the National Children's First Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare and Children it aims to:

- Respond in a supportive manner to families where children's welfare is under threat;
- Reduce risk to children by enhancing their family life;
- Prevent avoidable entry of children into the care system;
- Attempt to address current problems being experienced by children and families;
- Develop existing strengths of parents/carers and children who are under stress;
- Enable families to develop strategies for coping with stress;
- Provide an accessible, realistic and user-friendly service;
- Connect families with supportive networks in the community;
- Promote parental competence and confidence;
- Provide direct services to children;
- Assist in the reintegration of children back into their families.

The Da Project was supported by funding from the Ballyfermot URBAN Initiative, funded by the ERDF, NDP and Dublin City Council. The initiative is a European-wide scheme developed to address a range of problems associated with social and economic exclusion within deprived inner-city and urban areas. Ballyfermot in Dublin was targeted for support to help achieve community regeneration through this initiative. It has provided financial assistance to a range of projects and activities seeking to develop community amenities, infrastructure and resources, enhance community participation and improve the provision and delivery of services .

Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project has the specific aim of providing intensive interventions to children and families in Cherry Orchard where children are deemed to be at risk. To meet this aim the project provides a range of services to up to 25 families at any one time including:

- Individual work with children and parents, addressing issues such as self-esteem, school attendance, separation and parenting;
- Issue-based group work with children and parents, such as parenting programmes, drama groups etc;
- Centre-based family work and family meetings to improve communication within the family;
- Home-based family support work such as home management;
- Inter agency work;
- Advocacy work on behalf of families.

The project works with families that live in Cherry Orchard where at least one of the children is aged seven to 13 years and is deemed to be at risk of neglect or abuse, educational under-achievement and/or leaving school early, isolation within their peer groups and/or community, involvement in anti-social and/or criminal activity, or homelessness.

Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project is staffed by a project leader, three project workers and a family support worker who each work full-time, a part-time administrator and part-time cleaner.

The project is developed and delivered with the support of an advisory group made up of representatives from key local agencies and local residents.

## Rationale, aims and objectives

The rationale for the Da Project lay in the findings of the evaluation of family support projects provided through the Springboard Initiative undertaken in 2001. This showed that most of these projects worked almost exclusively with mothers and children despite evidence that the most effective interventions for improving the well-being of children involved supporting all the members of family networks. This evaluation highlighted the fact that fathers in particular were routinely ignored by most family support services and it questioned whether the provision of family support was compatible with a focus on mothers and the virtual exclusion of fathers. As a consequence the evaluation recommended that, 'services to families ... should give careful consideration to all elements of the family system and offer support in a holistic and inclusive manner' <sup>50</sup>.

The findings and recommendations of this evaluation on working with fathers through family support services were given further impetus by research with a specific focus on the role played by fathers in families<sup>8</sup>. This research sought to stimulate action by service providers to increase the positive involvement of fathers in the lives of their children by demonstrating fathers' positive attitudes towards parenting and greater parental involvement and the range of benefits to children associated with this involvement. It further endorsed and supported the recommendations of the evaluation of the Springboard Initiative by identifying the need for family support services to:

- Find out about the needs of fathers, particularly vulnerable fathers;
- Adopt a strengths-based approach to working with them;
- Train professionals to see fathers as part of families;
- Recruit more men into caring professions;
- And, promote awareness of family services in ways that are supportive of men and fathers at every stage<sup>8</sup>.

These recommendations received the endorsement of the then Minister for Children, Mary Hanafin, who concluded: 'I appreciate that fathers' involvement in quality parenting is important for the development and well-being of their children and their participation in this parenting can contribute to increased parental equality, both within and outside the home. Through its family support projects, the Springboard Family Support Initiative will continue to try to engage with these vulnerable fathers.'

In response to this Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project made an application to the Ballyfermot URBAN Initiative for financial support for a project that would:

- Explore why more fathers were not engaged in family support services;
- Research the needs of fathers in the community;
- Develop programmes that would be more suitable for fathers' needs;
- Examine and document best practice in terms of engaging and working with men.

To fulfil these aims the Da Project decided:

- To research the needs of fathers in the community;
- To examine best practice in terms of engaging and working with fathers;
- To develop, pilot and review programmes aimed at engaging fathers;
- To measure the programmes' impact on participants;
- To measure the impact the programmes have on the children and families of the fathers attending the programmes;
- To disseminate the learning and model of engagement of fathers to organisations that deliver family support services nationally and to influence them to adapt their services to be more proactive in engaging with fathers.

The Da Project was overseen by an advisory group comprising representatives of the project management team the local Health Service Executive and Department of Social and Family Affairs and a home school community liaison officer, and a community development project worker based in the local community.

## Development of the Da Project

In June 2003 Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project received confirmation that an application to the Ballyfermot URBAN Initiative for funding to support the Da Project had been successful. In this application the Da Project aimed to deliver a two phase, 12-week programme of group work targeting in the first phase up to seven fathers and, in the second, up to five older male siblings from families connected to Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project. It was anticipated that the programmes of group work would be delivered by a sessional fathers' worker employed on a sessional basis and that this dedicated, specialist provision would be coupled to the development of individual casework with fathers delivered by Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project. The programmes development was to be supported by a short programme of training to all the family support project staff, the sessional fathers' worker and members of the project advisory group and along with a survey of fathers who might be recruited to establish their needs and set a baseline for assessment of the impact of the programme.

By summer 2004, after a lengthy delay in implementing the Da Project due to problems with staff changeover in Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project and compounded by initial difficulties in identifying and appointing a trainer and a sessional fathers' worker, the initial staff training was completed. While the original aims and objectives remained the plan for the development and implementation of the work was completely revised reflecting a recognition of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project's relatively low level of engagement, expertise and access to fathers and the implications of this for what was feasible, appropriate and useful in developing work with fathers. This meant a shift from conceptualising the Da Project as a fairly discrete, intensive and time-limited piece of work with fathers to a recognition that it needed to engage in a wholesale change in the way Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project functioned to create an environment in which intensive work with fathers could take place as a complementary activity to the support already being provided to mothers and children. Project staff recognised that they needed to contact, engage and build relationships with fathers before any intensive work, either group or individual, could take place. To achieve this they knew staff attitudes and beliefs about fathers and the profile and practices of the project would have to alter so that it was more attractive and accessible to fathers. This reappraisal seems to have been fairly organic, but four particular events had a strong and discernible influence on the development of a new implementation strategy for the Da Project.

## 1. Profiling men to identify fathers who might be engaged in the Da Project

In May 2004, as preparation for the initial staff training event, Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project team undertook a profiling exercise. In this exercise they reviewed their knowledge base about fathers connected with the 25 families they were working with. Each member of the project staff team completed a pro forma for each father. They recorded the following:

- What was known about his relationship to the family and residency status;
- What use he was making of the project (formal/informal; frequent/infrequent; brief/in-depth);
- What needs he had including his expressed needs and his needs as perceived by the project;
- What scope/potential there was for engaging him;
- Any concerns they had about engaging with him.

Pro forma were completed for 29 fathers connected with the 25 families<sup>1</sup>.

This exercise revealed:

- That very few (seven) of the fathers were living with their families and not all of these were in stable relationships so their residency was not always permanent;
- About half the fathers (14) had regular contact with their children but nearly the same number (11) had no contact;
- Fathers' contact and engagement with Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project was low. Only four fathers were engaged at time of profiling and in all but one case this was characterised by workers as infrequent;
- Inevitably, given this low level of contact, workers knew very little about fathers' concerns and needs through fathers themselves;
- However, they thought fathers had a range of needs including addiction issues, difficulties with parenting or poor relationships with their children, poor relationships with the mothers of their children including in a few cases a history of violence, poor mental or physical health and/or problems with housing. They were also aware of child protection concerns in the case of two fathers;
- Finally, where scope for engaging fathers in the Da Project was concerned staff felt that very few (three) fathers might be potential recruits. They considered a further eight fathers there might be engaged in the project. A further 15 fathers were not considered suitable because they were thought to be inaccessible, because there were child protection concerns or concerns about the risk posed by their aggressiveness and violent conduct in the past.

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<sup>1</sup> The numbers of men included in this profiling exercise exceeded the number of families because some families had children with different fathers and others included a non-resident father and resident stepfather.

The significance of the profiling outcomes for the Da Project lay in how it confirmed the lack of contact between Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project and fathers. It also demonstrated the lack of knowledge about fathers among the staff. It showed the extent to which what was known was derived primarily from contact with mothers and, more importantly, the extent to which their views mediated decisions about whether fathers were potentially accessible to and appropriate for engagement in the Da Project. For project staff it raised concerns about their capacity to identify and engage sufficient fathers to make running programmes of group work feasible.

## **2. Initial staff training event**

The significance of the profiling results became clear only when there was an opportunity to reflect on them through the staff training event in July 2004.

Two days of intensive training were designed and delivered by an experienced trainer and facilitator of fathers' groups. The training was organised so that:

- Five project staff attended both days of training;
- Two representatives for the Da Project advisory group attended the first day of training and one attended the second day of training as project management;
- The sessional fathers' worker attended the second day of training.

The first day focused on increasing participants' awareness of the research evidence demonstrating the potentially positive outcomes for children and families of greater paternal involvement, developing their knowledge and understanding of fathers' needs and exploring methods of engaging and working with them. The second day involved reflection and review of the profiling outcomes and discussion about the eligibility criteria used to determine which fathers might be engaged in the Da Project. It also provided a context for discussion of perceptions of the project's impact on fathers, children and families and an opportunity for the sessional fathers' worker to meet the project team and clarify issues about roles and responsibilities and to discuss working practices and methods (see Appendix I).

Although the training was important for developing practice its real significance seems to have been in relation to the changes that it precipitated in participants' views and attitudes towards working with fathers and the increase in their awareness of how these were connected to their practice. This link became evident to participants when they reviewed the outcomes of the profiling exercise and reflected on the extent to which personal attitudes and beliefs and their investment in relationships with mothers connected to the project were influencing thinking about which fathers were eligible. As this staff member noted, their initial concern with recruiting sufficient numbers of fathers so that the planned programme of group work interventions could be implemented was replaced with an awareness of how their own attitudes and values combined with practices and procedures used in assessment activities with families were setting up barriers to engaging with fathers.

'When we went away on the training course I was a bit embarrassed and thinking negatively ...

"Where are we going to get these men?" ... there was, you know, a mental block there for me.

Then we went on the training and [the trainer] was fantastic at bringing us out into a wider way of thinking.

I remember thinking about when you're doing an assessment, are you talking about the father, highlighting that recent research shows that ... a child's development is enhanced by the input of the father ... a father's access to a child helps with reading, it helps with behaviour, it helps with their development and growth? And I think the thing that blew me away was when he put up, "all dads love children" and it's something that, you know, hadn't entered my head ... obviously when the father wasn't involved you weren't thinking that they loved their children anyway and that they wanted to be involved and that there might be a block there from the woman.'

For others, the training stimulated thinking about past practice in working around issues affecting fathers. As this member of staff noted:

'I don't think that the training caused it, I think it's you, know, I've always been aware that we're working with families and I am just more aware of it now and that means men too. You know I've got a case now where I am working with a lad and contact with his father is huge thing for him and it only really came up when we were talking about something else. It wasn't that I hadn't thought about how much it mattered to him but I hadn't, to be honest, thought about the fact that it might have implications for how we worked in the future or reflected that we hadn't even mentioned the fact of his father before, what with not really being on the scene as far as our work with the family went. So the training made me think about it differently, that maybe I could follow that through.'

This collective realisation that the Da Project might involve the development of more inclusive practices throughout the work of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project and implicate all staff members did raise concerns for some about the potential conflict that work with fathers might produce with work with mothers and the project's capacity to manage an increased workload.

'I mean it is good idea, of course, to do the Da Project, try to engage with men and that, but I am concerned, you know. I think that some of the mothers we work with have good reason not to want to have anything to do with the fathers and we might be dragging all that up for them ... and then I don't know if we can meet the demands in terms of the workload either. I mean it's going to mean a lot more work. I don't know, I think it is a good idea and all the research and that says we should try to get fathers involved more but I'm not sure this is the right context to try to do it in.'

The trainer endorsed the training's impact and implications. In his report on the outcomes of the training event he notes the following:

- There was a definite shift in perspective and awareness towards the inclusion of fathers and fathers' work in their own right;
- Shifted the participants to no longer putting the women's perspective first as a matter of unspoken practice;
- Realisations about the different ways that the team was excluding fathers in their everyday work with families.

### 3. Withdrawal of the sessional fathers' worker from the Da Project

The training moved participants towards a more critical reflective position on their practice and they were clearly persuaded of the need for Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project to go through a process of change in order to provide a supportive environment for the Da Project. However, at this stage the Da Project was still envisaged as a discrete activity connected to existing family support work. It was, following the training, the decision of the sessional fathers' worker not to take up the post offered to him, which initiated the final stage in the transformation of the Da Project into a process embedded in and across the Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project practice rather than a discrete intervention.

The principal reasons for the sessional fathers' worker decision not to accept the post were associated with his perceptions of what the work would involve and the commitment it would require of him. As he explained, the training had alerted him to the extent to which Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project needed to change the way that it worked so that it became a more supportive context for working with fathers and he felt there was neither the time nor scope within the role to achieve this task:

'I could see [from the training] that this job was not for really me. It wasn't an easy decision, but I wouldn't be doing them or myself any favours if I took it on. You could tell ... that this was going to be a huge amount of work. [The project] hadn't got any men involved and just to get into a position to run a group, which was what I thought I'd be doing, was going to take a lot of work. There's 64 hours allocated to the job which is enough to run a programme of group work and do some monitoring and reporting, but not set it up as well. I already run a group ... with men around addiction issues and I thought this would be the same ... come in, facilitate the group. The agenda here isn't really around men yet and that's not the work I want to do right now.'

Although this was temporarily disheartening, the sessional fathers' worker's participation in the training meant that Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff could explore its implications for the Da Project's development. As this member of staff put it:

'Well to be honest it was pretty devastating when he said wasn't going to take up the post [of sessional fathers' worker]. First of all I wondered what we were going to do. It threw the whole thing up in the air. Basically I would say that he didn't realise we were at the initial stages really and what he expected to do ... was to come in and facilitate a dads' group and, that's what we thought it would involve too but the training changed all that. You know, we'd already started to see how we'd all be involved at some level ... changing what we did in engaging with families and trying to engage fathers, and making the project more father-friendly. So, when he didn't want the job, and I understand it was going to be much more than he thought because we didn't have the dads already in a group or anything, it took some getting used to but it wasn't the end of the world.'

Another commented on how it contributed to a re-evaluation by Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff of what would be involved in moving to a position where they could engage in in-depth work with fathers.

'I was thinking I am going away on holiday and when I come back in September it's all change ... there's this new bit of work coming in ... but that's life ... when you start a piece of work the reality is there's always hiccups along the way and you just have to get on with it. So ... we need to look at making this place man friendly, d'you know that was one thing that came up. Do you know we do not have any pictures of men on the wall? You know we've got one picture downstairs of a father ... and it's facing the stairs as you come down so you don't see it as you come in the door. The training showed us we're not in position yet to think about running groups. We've got a lot of other things to do first to make this a father-friendly place.'

In addition, the participation of the sessional fathers' worker in the training and his decision not to take up the post also helped to stimulate more critical thinking about the Da Project's purpose and its relationship to the work of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project. Through debate and discussion centred on protecting the involvement and investments of fathers and mothers in the work, project staff clarified the need for an explicit focus in working with both on the potential benefits to children which might flow from the Da Project. Staff believed this clarity of purpose might appeal to fathers and help to allay any concerns that mothers might have about how working with fathers might affect relationships between them.

#### 4. Project Planning Review

The impact of these events on staff's perceptions of the Da Project fed into a review and planning meeting in September 2004. This meeting looked again at which fathers might be eligible for engagement in the Da Project and which of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project's practices and procedures might need to be reviewed and revised because they had colluded in fathers' lack of engagement with the project. As one member of staff put it:

'The training definitely made us look again at how we worked with families and how we usually worked through the mother in the house. You know, we were often going to make a home visit and if a man, the father, opened the door he'd probably say, "I'll get the wife" and we never really challenged this. Sometimes I suppose we might say, "We'll come back when she's in" if he said she wasn't there. The training made us think that there was an opportunity we weren't taking to say to him, to talk to him, to ask him about his involvement and needs and what we could do for him.'

They also realised that Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project knew little about many of the fathers connected to families they worked with. Systems of referral and assessment meant that the identity, involvement and whereabouts of many fathers of the children they worked with were not known and that they had been relying on mothers as their primary source of information in deciding their eligibility. In addition, project staff recognised that they would need to build the confidence and understanding of mothers about the purpose of the Da Project.

'You know ... we have been working with mothers because they are the ones that do engage with the centre and because they're generally the ones looking after their children ... with so many Dads not even being around ... they've just haven't been in the picture usually ... and those relationships have taken a long time to build up ... it takes time to build, you know, trust with the women we've worked with and some of them are really like trying to cope without men ... and have had difficult and sometimes abusive relationships with the fathers of their children so it's not easy to then say we want to work with these men and it raises the prospect of us bringing them back into their lives.'

As well as specific work with mothers, staff recognised the need to change perceptions of the project among fathers.

'Being a children's organisation ... you know focused on the child and supporting the family to provide a better future for the child ... maybe that has made us closer to women as well. It's them that mostly look after and raise the children in the families we work with ... and it's probably a bit of turn-off for the fathers being so much about children. I think as well that Barnardos is often seen as being about child protection and that probably makes men wonder what are we going to do for them and maybe, it's like a bit off-putting ... like are we involved because we think there's a suspicion of abuse or their children are at risk, or if they engaged with us it's because they're under suspicion. Actually I don't even know if most fathers would have any idea what we do!'

The planning review meeting was important for developing and planning a new strategy for the Da Project:

- The initial profiling exercise to assess which fathers were eligible for engagement in the Da Project was reappraised and led to the identification of 19 fathers for potential engagement.

This was achieved by agreeing the purpose of this engagement and the following clear preconditions for it:

That Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project works in the best interests of the child, with this in mind:

- Children have a right to a positive relationship with their fathers;
- Fathers have a right to a positive relationship with their children;
- But there are limited exceptions when this is not possible.
- Mothers have a right to know we are contacting fathers;
- Mothers' views should be heard and considered;
- Children's views should be heard and considered.

Clarity about the conditions under which engagement with fathers would not be sought include:

- Potential risk of child abuse
  - Which has been independently verified;
  - Which is not manageable on an ongoing basis, eg. appropriate supervision cannot be provided, or risk would not be manageable after case closure;
  - Where there are issues of child abuse the views of the social work department within the Health Service Executive will be sought.
- Potential risk to mother/partner of abuse or domestic violence
  - The risk is not manageable on an ongoing basis, for example appropriate supervision cannot be provided, or risk would not be manageable after case closure;
  - Where there is/was a risk of domestic violence the views of the social work department within the Health Service Executive will be sought.
- Timing in relation to the work with the family
  - Maintaining relationships with the families is paramount. This is not a reason to say a blanket *no* but may be a reason to say *not yet* to involving the father.
- A new implementation plan for the Da Project was developed which included:
  - Asking an existing project worker to take on a designated role to stimulate and support work with fathers within the Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project team, rather than appointing a sessional fathers' worker;
  - Ongoing consultations with mothers about support to fathers;
  - Making changes to referral and assessment forms and processes to ensure that information is gathered about fathers and informing relevant agencies of these changes;
  - Making changes to the project's physical environment so that it becomes more 'father-friendly';
  - Raising the profile of fathers through professional networks and the Da Project advisory group and through delivering and displaying posters portraying positive images of fathers in the community;
  - Consulting fathers about their needs and possible engagement with the project;
  - The development of individual and family work by family keyworkers and by the Da Project.

The project plan also included a commitment to undertake some wider awareness raising activity with the community at large to raise the profile of the role of fathers in family life and create a more positive environment around fathering with the knock-on effects of stimulating men's interest in the project. The focus of this would be planning and implementing an activity or activities associated with Fathers' Day 2005.

## Findings

### Exploring and understanding the context for the Da Project

#### 1. Fathers and fathering

An important component in the revised Da Project planning was to establish how fathers and fathering were perceived within the Cherry Orchard community in general and by members of the families connected with Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project in particular. The work was undertaken collaboratively with the evaluator to:

Explore views on fathers and fathering in the community as a basis for developing the intervention:

- Provide a broad contextual picture in which to locate and better understand the project's impact on the community and the individual father and the family;
- Build relationships between the evaluator and contributors to the evaluation;
- Begin to promote awareness of the Da Project.

These consultations were a two-part activity, focusing initially on the perceptions of women and children and, subsequently, supplementing these with the views of fathers as they engaged with the Da Project. Consultations were loosely structured, aiming to explore contributors' views on the roles fathers fulfil in family life, the attributes of a good father, how men locally 'do' as fathers, and what helps and hinders them in their parenting roles.

Consultations were held with four groups in November 2004 of seven young mothers aged 17 to 23 years, three mothers in their 30s, four boys aged eight to 10 years and four younger children (three girls and one boy). The young mothers were contacted through the Cherry Orchard Equine Centre where they were attending education classes, the mothers in their 30s were either current or past clients of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project and met in the local community centre and the children were consulted through groups run at Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project.

With the young mothers the consultation was initiated through selecting photographs from a WWM resource pack. These were used as a stimulus for discussion about men's roles in family life. This progressed to more open-ended and general group discussion about men, fathers and fathering which the evaluator facilitated. The consultation with the other group of women followed a similar discursive format although the images from the WWM photopack were not used. Discussion was structured around drawing activities in which both groups of children made images of significant male figures in their lives and talked about their characteristics and attributes. The group of boys was also involved in brainstorming about fathers and their hopes and expectations of themselves as potential father figures. Project staff took an active part in facilitating and managing both groups.

## 2. The worlds of the Da and the Ma

It was evident from the consultations with women that the traditional, normative conception of the Irish family as a father and a mother living together in a settled, romantic relationship, providing for their children by fulfilling the complementary roles of bread-winner and home-maker, still dominates the cultural landscape. Even where their own lives diverged from this norm it provided the point of reference and comparison for all other forms of family life.

For these women, motherhood was defined as the ability to maintain the family, keep the home and, often, provide financially by working outside the home. Enabling the family to get by and get along defined motherhood and, as these women acknowledged, where it involved taking over or contributing to bread-winning as well as running the home, it sidelined the father's role as the financial provider.

As mothers put it, men were incompetent around the house and even a liability, generating more work if they tried to help. In fact, they often said that having a man about the house was like having another child. They perceived the father's role as playmate for his children, company for his partner and bringing home the wages. The consultations with women were littered with accounts of how fathers played with their children, watched videos and television with them, sat and talked to them – all activities valued for their capacity to divert attention away from the mother, because they demonstrated paternal affection and because it made the children happy. The extent of parental role separation was clear. Mothers said:

- Men do not do cooking, cleaning, putting children to bed, getting them up, washing or ironing (unless asked repeatedly);
- They do not have contact with schools, public services and welfare on behalf of the family;
- They go to work and earn money;
- They play with their children and have fun with them;
- They take them to clubs and social events – especially football and karate.

This is what some mothers said:

'Well, he does the work and earns the money. That's the main thing he does, like. I don't say he doesn't do anything else but if he was to put the kiddies clothes away or do the washing up it'd be more of a surprise than anything else.'

And,

'Main thing my man does is he comes in and sits with the children and watches telly, like. I'll be doing the tea and they'll all be cuddled up on the sofa watching the telly. They love that, to have him home and watching their programmes with him. I think he likes it too.'

And,

'He's never gonna be up the school or at the doctors for injections and that. That's the ma's job that is. He probably hated school himself and so he's not going to go back. He takes the boys up to karate though, every week like.'

When asked to talk about the reasons for fathers' lack of involvement in domestic labour and these other forms of care and involvement with children, these women believed there were two main factors. First, the absence of any role model in their own experiences of being fathered:

'Well it's difficult like. I suppose I would like him to do more but he's got no learning for that, not from his family like. His da and probably his da's da wouldn't have raised a finger and so he's not learned it like. I think at the end of the day it's the woman's role though isn't it. Doesn't matter whether you like it or not. Anyways if you do it, it's done right.'

And, second, constitutional unsuitability, especially looking after infants:

'He wouldn't know what do about a baby. He might do the nappy if I ask him but he's not going to offer is he ... and then men, they don't know nothing about babies really. I think when they're really little and that it's all down to the mother. Anyway if your man's working he isn't going to be getting up half the night and feeding and that cos he needs his rest.'

Importantly, they also felt that if fathers were more deeply involved in the parenting activities which focused on 'managing' children this would diminish the benefits that children and mothers derived from fathers' role as a relief from 'telling' and 'bossing'. Mothers saw themselves as harrying and hustling their children through the day - getting them up, ready for and to school, fed and watered, and this could introduce tension into their relationship. The father, particularly if he was absent all day at work or lived apart from the family and was a visitor to the home, could provide entertainment and diversion for the children from this when he came in., By taking care of them he relieved the mother of some of the onus of always seeming to be 'at' the children.

'He's like so calm with them ... you have be running round all day doing things. He has like more time for them, d'you know what I mean like. Whereas you have them all day and you have to go around doing things, bossing them about getting dressed and eating, getting them washed for school and that. I don't say that they hate me now, but you're always onto them it seems like and their father's a relief from that for them and for me. I mean he occupies them with playing or something and I get five minutes and they get five minutes too in a way. I think that's good.'

These mothers acknowledged the extent to which these views about the role played by fathers in family life and the benefits they could bring to children's well-being and the well-being of the family as a whole were strongly underscored by their own experiences of being parented by their fathers. Often women spoke about the lack of petty friction in their relationships with their fathers because of the relatively small role that they played in the family's domestic life.

'My own da and ma? Well what I remember mostly is that he was like a hero to me. It was my ma I'd argue with, or like, be getting a telling off from. I spose cos she was always the one at home with us and that ... but me da, he'd like just wink or something if there'd been an argument like and calm me ma down and like protect us from her. She weren't bad or anything but he was always like the peace-maker if you know what I mean. He never seemed to be angry with us, with no one, no. I never heard him shouting like she would sometimes. Looking at it he probably saw the best of us and never had any trouble off us so he'd no need to shout about anything.'

'If fathers did more like mothers I'd wonder if the kids like it so much? I mean the thing about dads is that they're like a bit out of the house and you don't know them in the same way as your ma. There's more excitement when they do something with you ... I always looked up to my da in a way different to my ma. She looked after us and that ... and I appreciate it more now I know what bringing babies up is all about myself... but your da is your da and he's like a god really.'

While this was mothers' perception generally of paternal roles in family life, there were distinct differences in the views of those who were in a relationship with the father of their children and those who were separated from them. This centred on the scope for and possible benefits of initiating change in this relationship between male and female parenting roles and responsibilities. In general, mothers living with the fathers of their children thought there was some, if not much, scope for altering the balance of responsibilities for domestic labour and the day-to-day care of children. In contrast, those mothers separated from the fathers of their children saw little or no scope for initiating change in the father's domestic involvement. For them the father's primary role was to 'be there for the children' sometimes providing support in the form of baby-sitting, or taking them to and from clubs and activities. In other cases where the break with the father had been total, usually because of a history of violence or involvement with alcohol and drugs, the mothers saw themselves and the children as better off without his disruptive and damaging presence.

Where there was contact between children and their fathers, mothers were keen to see an improvement in the quality of this relationship. Here, more clearly than anywhere else in the accounts gathered through this consultation, women articulated a relationship between men's ability to parent and their masculine identity:

'It's not like he's a bad man or a bad father or anything like that at all ... but he's not like, very good with his feelings, d'you know what I mean. You can tell, like sometimes he's all screwed up with rage and anger and that he just won't talk about it. He can be furious with the kids and he'll like he'll just do nothing. Not say a word. Or another time he'll be the other way. Too hard on them when they need him to be more softer like. It's like the way men are, you know. Women, they'll go and talk to each other, have a good gossip and bitch and get it all out of their system but he's like men, like carrying it all around. You know, I don't think they ever talk to ... other men about these things. Never.'

We pursued this in the consultations with boys, engaging them in two activities in which they generated 'brainstorms' and used this as the basis for talking about 'being a man' and 'what a da is'. These boys were enthusiastic and engaged however, functioning as a group was not easy for them. Jockeying for position and attention, maintaining face in front of their peers and not wanting to compromise their reputations with project staff undoubtedly affected their contributions. At first these boys expressed highly rigid and stereotypical views about masculinities and manhood. Their brainstorm, consisted of being, 'good'; 'cool'; 'decent'; 'like cars'; 'twenty old'; 'brainy'; 'big'; 'beard'; 'having different bodies to women (different legs and sexually)'; 'being fast'; being stronger'; 'and not having to go through all the trouble of having babies'. They talked about men in terms of their physicality and how it embodied the 'virtues' of resilience and toughness which they contrasted with the softer characteristics of women.

'Like your da's like he's more, he's more tougher than your ma. He's like a man isn't he? ... Men are like bigger and that and they do the tough things like women don't.'

They thought that men were sometimes aggressive and violent so they could project and deal with inner pain and anger and that this might sometimes be directed on towards others or onto themselves. Talking about a photograph of a grumpy-looking man working on a building site one boy commented:

'I think he's had a fight with his wife and they had an argument and he's mad and now he's being mad with everyone at work. He's quite likely going to get into a fight or something. Like when you're uptight and upset and that you might take it out on someone else.'

Despite the importance of self-sufficiency and 'hardness' in being a man, they also thought, when pushed on the issue, that it was legitimate for men to show a softer side and be involved in looking after others but that this would, characteristically, involve providing practical help and support rather than emotional care. Looking after animals and helping wheelchair users to cross the road or into shops were cited as examples of this kind of care.

Moving on to 'what a da is' involved transplanting these attributes into the role of the father. They talked about fathers (and granddads, uncles, older brothers and other father-figures in their lives) mainly in terms of the access they provide to the world outside the home. They told stories, with evident pleasure, about getting rides in their cars, going to work with them during the school holidays, and a variety of social activities. Being a 'da' meant: 'taking you to school'; 'being big'; 'being fit'; 'having children'; 'having a decent job'; 'having a decent wife'; 'buying the food'; 'keeping horses'; 'taking you fishing'; 'having money'; 'taking you to their work sometimes'; 'taking you for a spin in the car'; 'picking you up'; 'doing sports'; and, 'giving you money', 'getting money for your family'.

The consultation with a younger, mixed-sex group of children followed a similar structure although the focus was on drawing rather than brainstorm and making pictures of important male figures in their lives and talking about them. The characteristic these children most closely associated with father-figures was 'having fun'. Their pictures showed men with their cars (going for a drive again), teaching them to play musical instruments, taking them shopping, walking the dog, going to the playground with them.

### 3. Becoming a Da

Women had a strong sense of the impact that becoming a father had on their partners. This was evident among the group of younger mothers, perhaps because their initiation into parenthood had taken place relatively recently. Fatherhood, they said, had changed their partners, revealing attributes and emotions they had never previously seen. The moment at which fathers had first seen and held their children was significant.

'It's was like shock. His face ... I remember his face. I'd never like seen him look like that. He was full of pride and love. He was so amazed like about the baby. He was gentle and ... just looked shocked. I didn't realise that he could feel like that. You'd think he had the baby. But he made a full recovery.'

Other changes were slower to emerge and longer lasting.

'I didn't think he'd change that much but he did change. Like he completely changed ... It's like when they're a young fella all they want to do is hang around and do whatever. He just changed. He works now for a start. That's how he's changed. And he's more responsible and thinking more of the kids than just himself. He's definitely grown up.'

And,

'He became calm. I wouldn't have thought that when I was pregnant that he was going to get close to the baby. It was a bigger thing for him almost than me. Yes, it changes them.'

### 4. Being a Da

While birth did not figure in men's accounts of their experiences of fatherhood, they had a considerable amount to say about their perceptions of what being a father entailed. While fathers were important as bread-winners and the titular heads of the family, above all, and whether they lived with their children or not, it was an emotional bond between father and child that was thought to define their relationship. Women also believed this and even where they were separated from the fathers of their children believed that in order to respect and preserve this bond there should be contact between fathers and children as long as it could be accomplished safely and without risk. As one mother said:

'I tried to, I do try to promote his involvement with his children ... the door is open ... come to the door here, it's open ... I never stop them from seeing their da ... but what I don't like is the drinking ... when he's been drinking and then there's the aggressiveness and the madness. All I can do is try to get myself on track again and try to keep the kids in touch with their father.'

For both men and women the emotional link between child and father was identified as the most important characteristic of fathering and the principled belief that they should have contact with each other that flowed from it, was informed at a profound level by their own experiences of being fathered, and where it had happened, the pain caused by separation from their father through bereavement or family breakdown. As this mother commented:

'Their das are important to them you know. Like the kids they love their daddy, no matter what. You know yourself. He's ... special to you. You know from your own father. You was always daddy's little girl and he was always your da. He took you places and did things for you that no one would do.'

And this from a father who characteristically among the men, focused less explicitly on the emotional dimensions of the father-child bond and more on the concrete aspects of their relationship although the emotional significance is still evident. What also emerges here is the notion that fathers are the means by which children access the world outside the home and also that he can provide means to taking risks and having experiences which the protective mother would not countenance:

'My da was a grand man. We was always doing things. Out with the ... truck delivering and that. And you'd be allowed to ride up the top with him and feed the horses. My father was always getting me to do things I maybe shouldn't have, me mother would have killed me ... she'd have killed him if she'd known. But your father ... that's what your father's for ... for bringing you out into a taste of the world.'

This comment from another mother illustrates how the significance and importance of the father-child relationship means they feel they should try to maintain it despite the breakdown in the parental relationship:

'For me it doesn't matter what's between us [the mother and father]. Our relationship is over, I don't want him back, that's gone now. But he's their father you know. Whatever our relationship is like I can't put an end to that ... don't want to. Who would want to deny their children to their father ... you'd not stop them loving them and they'd never forgive me ... I'd never be able to live with myself.'

The role of the father as the family's primary financial provider had a fairly low priority in the accounts of women and men involved in the Da Project although, as we have seen, it was still an important aspect of boys' perceptions of the responsibilities of fatherhood. No doubt for adults the importance of fathers providing financially for the family had diminished because of unemployment, family separation and instability in fathers' personal circumstances. However, it still figured, as this father explained:

'This heavy work. It's really a younger man's game but it's work you know. You got to do it ... It pays for the kiddies' Christmas presents and that ... I need the money. What I'd like to do is get a place of me own d'you know and then they can come and stay at weekends and that. It'd take some of the pressure off their mother. That's what I want, to be able to have them to stay. I'm not going to get a place off the corporation ... I'm not a priority like a woman on her own ... so I got to work to earn the money to try and get a place myself.'

Even for fathers without any work at all, the importance of providing for their children in the longer term was still important to them. As this father said:

'I got this little house down in the country, you know. I'm going to make sure that they get that when they're older. We bought it years ago and were going to go and live there like. I was thinking about it the other day. It needs a little bit of work and that but it's going to be how I see them all right.'

As well as providing in practical ways for their children in the here and now, fathers saw an important part of their role as making sure that their children would be economically secure in the future. The primary route to this security was by doing well at school. Like mothers, they feared their children were vulnerable to involvement in drinking, drug-taking, crime, and in the case of girls, sexual exploitation and sought to protect them from these risks. Evidence of engagement and success at school were often reported with pride. For example,

'She's the cleverest in her class that one [his daughter]. She's always showing the teacher up knowing more than she does ... there was this time the teacher asked them about the European Union and something about who's in it, and she comes home and looks it up and goes back and tells the teacher that she's wrong. The teacher she wouldn't have it. But that girl, she knew more than the teacher. She's always in her books and that. She's got brains that one.'

Significantly, what was lacking in most fathers' accounts was a perception of how this achievement might be supported or encouraged, and in what ways their own behaviour might have an influence on it. In a few cases, there were detailed accounts of attempts to combat children 'going off the rails' but these were the exception and often the role of the father in supporting their children was downplayed and the lack of accessible support from professional agencies highlighted.

Alongside providing financially for their children and trying to ensure their current and future safety and security some fathers did play a role in other aspects of parenting. Several fathers, including those separated from the mothers of their children, fulfilled baby-sitting duties. Sometimes this was on a fairly ad hoc basis, but in a few it had a more structured dimension usually where the father's contribution to looking after the children freed their mother to go to work. As this father explained:

'I'm here a lot. I come here every day ... I work nights and then after I finish I come here to look after the children while she [the mother] goes off to work. I give them their breakfast and get them ready for school and then I goes home myself for a sleep before I go back to work at night.'

Finally, there was abundant evidence that fathers fulfilled, and enjoyed fulfilling, a role in their children's lives as playmates. This was often observed by mothers as associated with their role as baby-sitter (in the case of separated parents), where they appreciated that children and fathers interacted in ways that were quite different to those in mother-child interactions. As one mother noted:

'He's better with them than me sometimes. He'll roll around on the floor playing with them and get them doing things. They love having him here. They'll do karate and stuff I'd never do, like playing.'

However, the differences in parenting styles could provoke tensions, especially where fathers interpreted domestic rules more laxly than mothers:

'He's good with them and that but he doesn't always like to be as strict as I am. I like them to be in bed if they've got school ... and he might let them sit up later than me and he'll get them all hyper too ... over-excited. I have to say sometimes that he doesn't think about how it'll be the next day, which I have to.'

## 5. Raising fathers

Despite some ambivalence about the scope for changing fathers' involvement with their children and their role in domestic life, mothers, and young mothers in particular, were deeply committed to trying to raise their sons to become 'better' fathers. They were optimistic, believing their sons did not fulfil the stereotypes of boys as tough and emotionally reticent. They thought this provided grounds on which to help them to develop respectful attitudes towards women and to be emotionally literate and responsible fathers. In practice this meant they were trying to raise their sons to consider violence especially towards women as unacceptable, to be able to say when they were unhappy and upset rather than bottling it up or expressing it through anger, in due course, being prepared to get a job to support their family.

Like fathers, they saw the world outside the family presented the main obstacles to their sons becoming good fathers. They were keen to steer their children clear of the worst excesses associated with male peer groups. These included men hanging around in gangs, drinking, drug use and causing trouble. They also identified the culture of maternal dominance within the home, which they themselves had grown up with as a negative influence and argued that boys needed to be given more responsibilities on the domestic front in order to encourage them to be involved when they became fathers.

'We've got a lot of responsibility ... for the fathers of the future, you know. I look at my boy and he's still a soft lad. He talks to you and shows how he feels and that. I want him to grow up keeping that and being a responsible da. It's easy to go off the rails, you look at the men hanging about the estate and drinking and doing drugs and all that trouble. Oh he's not going to do that if I can help it ... You've got to do more to make them grow up too and face their responsibilities like working for the family and doing things at home. If you treat them like babies then they grow up the same way and you'll make them like big kids even when they're older and should be taking their responsibilities.'

## 6. Role of services and support for fathers

The women contributing to this consultation were adamant that men did not use support services and did not see themselves as potential clients. They thought the men they knew were generally averse to talking about their problems and concerns and did not see their needs warranting any support on offer. They also thought men would see support services as intruding into the family's private business. They also thought that men might not see services as trying to target them. For example, if they were fathering children who were not their own, or not living with their family they might not see themselves as 'the sort of father' that family support services were trying to reach. They believed men often did not think of their needs as fathers at all which meant that services for fathers might seem inappropriate. Most younger women had never had a conversation with a man about what kind of help they might seek, especially for parenting and felt unclear what their needs would be or what a project might set out to achieve.

'I don't think that men really use ... support at all. They don't think about telling someone if there's anything wrong. Most of the time I think they see it as being like it is ... it's just life isn't it. Anyway if you go around saying you're helping fathers, what's that mean? What kind of help is that? Who's a father – a man who's living with you but the children's father? ... If his problem is with his wife then he's not thinking he's going to talk to a father's project.'

In contrast, among the women in their 30s there was a clearer idea of what needs fathers might have and when these might arise. They identified that some men were probably in a state of mind in which they might accept help and support especially where they were uncertain about parenting children with behavioural difficulties. They thought services for these fathers might, primarily, set out to provide them with a safe, all-male environment in which to talk, share experiences and develop as individuals.

'I think that a father, he might get help if he was worried about his kids mostly. If they were in trouble or something like that he might want someone to help ... but he's going to have trouble asking ... maybe from another man, another father in the same situation he might. They definitely need that ... to talk to other men like themselves and just like they was chatting, talk about being a father.'

Most fathers involved with the Da Project had no direct, personal experience of family support services although they sometimes knew of them through the involvement of their children and the mothers of their children. The few that had engaged with family support had done so through their partners and as part of work with the family. However, many fathers had had contact with public services of one sort or another though this was not always voluntary or in positive circumstances. At least two fathers had served or were serving prison sentences and were familiar with the legal criminal court and penal systems. Others had had some limited contact with corporation housing services and some with Health Service Executive social work services, often in the context of child protection issues. Given this history of contact with public services it was not surprising that most men did not perceive themselves as potential service users. Moreover, when they talked about family support services in particular, they rarely identified themselves as needing them.

'I don't have any problems like ... I try to keep myself to myself ... it's just me. I don't really have a social life ... I just does me job, it pays, it gives me a few bob at the end of every week ... I have me routine, work, the kids in the week and the Friday and Saturday is my own like. I don't need no help – what with?'

## Implementation of the Da Project

These consultations set the immediate context for the Da Project which involved the following stages and activities:

### **June to August 2003: Project development**

- Project advisory group formed;
- Tender documents for the project's training and evaluation elements drawn up.

### **September 2003 to March 2004: Project planning**

- Tendering process for the project's training and evaluation elements was initiated, and the evaluation agency identified;
- Project advisory group meeting;
- Negotiations with funder over revised project time scale and outcome indicators.

### **April to August 2004: Project implementation – staff training**

- Project training provider, evaluator and sessional fathers' worker identified and contracted;
- Profiling exercise;
- Staff training delivered (to five project staff, two members of the project advisory group and sessional fathers' worker)
- Sessional fathers' worker withdraws from the project;
- Project advisory group meeting.

### **September 2004 to March 2005: Project implementation – engaging fathers**

- Cherry Orchard referral and assessment forms revised to be father inclusive;
- Initial engagement with fathers (via survey);
- Posters and materials positively promoting fathering circulated to local agencies and organisations;
- Project advisory group meeting.

### **April to September 2005: Project implementation – working with fathers and promoting positive images of fatherhood with the community**

- Trips and activities with fathers and fathers and children (engagement with eight fathers);
- Individual casework activity with fathers;
- Planning and implementation of Fathers' Day competition;
- Project advisory group meeting.

### **September 2005 to December 2005: Project implementation – working with fathers**

- Individual casework activity with fathers (engagement with 11 fathers);
- Compilation of project evaluation report.

## Methods, approaches and issues: Working with fathers

The main strand of activity in the Da Project's implementation was the work undertaken directly with fathers. This work focused on making contact with, engaging and building trust and rapport between project staff and fathers laying the basis for the development of individual in-depth casework. This included:

- Surveying fathers' involvement with the families and their needs and interest in engaging with the Da Project;
- Providing a programme of social activities for fathers and for fathers and their children;
- Delivering ad hoc support to fathers through opportunistic response to their needs;
- Beginning to develop the delivery of in-depth support via individual casework.

### 1. Contact and engagement

In the main, fathers were initially contacted through the mothers of their children. This reflected the much greater degree of involvement of mothers with Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project and the need to ensure that they understood the rationale behind the intervention with the fathers of their children, especially where their own relationship with him was difficult or poor. In some cases these mothers remained an important agent of the project, supporting and encouraging fathers' engagement and providing a continuing link by which project staff could reach them. As this mother's account demonstrates, initial contact with fathers sometimes came about through seizing opportunities when they arose. In this case she describes an encounter with a father when project staff were visiting her to assess her response to approaching the father of her children:

'They [two project staff] was up here one day ... and they ... says there's something to do with fathers coming up and she said to me would you mind if I said to your ex and try and see if he'll get involved with the kids and I said, "No, No" I said. And so she came back in and said to him, "Would you be interested in coming over to the project, there's something going on for dads and children" and he says, "No I'll go, I'll go". She says too that the kids were always talking about him ... when they're over there [at the project] and that's why she said to me as well would I mind if they got him involved and I said "No. No, I wouldn't mind".'

Fathers were initially asked to complete a survey through an interview with a staff member. Staff approached this survey primarily as an opportunity to make contact with and begin to build a relationship with fathers rather than as a data collection exercise per se. They explained the work of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project to fathers and the background to the Da Project and, where appropriate, talked to fathers about their hopes and expectations, worries and concerns about their children, their views on what kinds of activities they might like to be engaged with through the project and any issues or concerns they needed support with. A copy of the questionnaire is appended to this report (see appendix II). This process of surveying fathers was an ongoing process, taking in fathers as contact was made. The initial round of making contact with fathers in November 2004 involved seven fathers rising to 11 by February 2005. The outcomes of the survey identified the need for:

- Opportunities to spend time with their children;
- Support to address their concerns about their children;
- Help to meet their aspirations for their children;
- Opportunities to do things with other men;
- Opportunities to identify and address further needs in a safe environment.

Having made contact with some fathers and begun the process of identifying their needs and interests staff tried to increase their level of engagement with them by developing a range of strategies and methods suited to fathers' particular needs and circumstances. These included:

- Organising trips and outings for fathers and for fathers and their children;
- Making home visits and telephone calls to fathers;
- Meeting fathers in other settings;
- Inviting fathers to join in with activities involving their children that were taking place within the project.

The variety of approaches to engagement with fathers reflected the diversity of their needs, interests and circumstances. Social activities, such as outings and trips, were particularly appealing to those men who had limited access to and contact with their children and whose primary concern was to find ways to spend time with them. Even within the group of men engaged with the project through social activities and trips there was variation in how this happened. Some were happy to join in group activities with other families, fathers and their children, such as a day trip to the seaside, while others were keener to spend time with their children without other fathers, in some cases coming into the project to join their children in craft activities. Some fathers even took part in activities with some of their children and other activities with others. In addition, some fathers took part in activities organised exclusively for fathers such as visits to a local pitch and putt course and tenpin bowling.

Although the idea of doing things socially with their children appealed to most men, for some their circumstances meant it was not possible. Some had work commitments which ruled it out and a few fathers were in prison which meant their only contact with their children was through prison visiting. In some cases fathers were reluctant to meet other fathers and to engage in social activities at all and had to be engaged through outreach which took place in settings away from Cherry Orchard.

Although the modes and context for engagement with fathers were diverse they clearly functioned for fathers in a number of ways. For some they provided an opportunity to form relationships with other fathers:

'Now that trip was fun, wasn't it. I liked the golf and we had a laugh didn't we. None of us were any good but it didn't matter. I liked that little chap too [another father] he was all right and we had a good yarn. Fancy us both having them records from way back? You'd never have thought we liked the same music then.'

And for others the opportunity to spend more time with their children;

'She [the member of staff] just asked me if I wanted to go on trip and I said no problem. The first time I came was when we made some cookies, chocolate rice crispies ... and I helped out painting the wall ... then we went down to the beach. It was great. They gave us lunch and we went and played on the beach, messing around ... It's an opportunity for me to see the kids a bit more. Every Sunday they come up and I used to bring them to school but now I am working and I just go down to the school sometimes. I see them after work too. It's good. It means that I get involved with them more and doing things with them.'

Overall, these activities seem to have met their primary aim of providing a means for project staff to begin to develop a relationship with fathers and begin to create a positive impression of the project. As this father said:

'Well I didn't know what they did before that. I knew that they done trips for the children before and they go down most weeks to like a club or something but I didn't know what it was they did or what they were like ... I thought they were nice, nice people. Easy-going and that and trying to help. When you don't know people it takes a bit of time you know.'

It is notable that organising and implementing these processes of engagement was labour intensive. All trips required at least two staff members and considerable negotiation between the project and the fathers and families involved to identify appropriate times and locations for activities. Often immediately before activities staff would have to call fathers to remind them of the event and check that they were coming. In addition, trips and activities often took place out of normal working hours to fit in with men's working arrangements and other commitments, requiring flexibility from project staff.

## 2. Mediating fathers' engagement in the Da Project with mothers

Mothers provided the primary means of making contact with fathers. Although they were largely supportive of staff attempts to engage with fathers, a lot of time and energy was required to explain the purpose of Da Project to them, in some cases, to respond to the concerns and difficulties that arose between them and the fathers of the children. Examples of this included situations where fathers demanded access to their children from mothers at inappropriate times and concerns that a mother's support for a father's involvement in the project might be interpreted as a willingness to resume a relationship with him. As the account of this mother illustrates, she was aware that the Da Project was not responsible for this father's behaviour but her reaction demanded a reassuring response from staff members:

'He just turns up here, drunk out of his head and sitting on the wall and carrying on. Disturbing the neighbours and me and the children. I know that the project didn't mean that to happen but at first I thought maybe it's going to cause me more trouble. I can't cope with that right now. I'm just getting myself back on me feet ... but you know I understand that's he a grown man and that what he does he does and no one can stop that. God knows I can't and the project can't.'

What was required, beyond specific response to these concerns was for staff to articulate clearly the rationale and aims of their attempts to engage with fathers. The important thing was to emphasise the potential benefits to children of greater paternal involvement. This staff member describes what was said to parents when introducing them to the Da Project:

'Recent research has shown that fathers' involvement with their children has benefits in terms of their development ... how they grow up and they do better at school and are less likely to get in trouble if that relationship is good. I always explain that to women and men when I talk about the project. And I explain that we're trying to find ways of getting men more involved. If their children come to the project ... we tell them they can come and see them and join in and do some activity or have something to eat. I think people see it straightaway ... The women mostly want their children to see their dads and the dads want to see more of their children especially if they don't live with them, and who doesn't want their children to do better?'

Mothers immediately understood the rationale for the Da Project when they heard this. They saw it as a potentially positive force for change in fathers and welcomed the project for relieving them of some of the burden and trying to initiate that.

'Well I mean, it's good that the project like puts time into fathers, it does. Especially, like, I can't help him at the moment ... No matter how much I say go to counselling, go to this, go to that, do that. He has turned round and said why don't you do it? Why don't you ring up? Hopefully, the project will help him do that for himself.'

For fathers the slightly 'distancing' effect of focusing the project on benefiting children often helped them to engage without fear of admitting to or exposing their own vulnerabilities:

'I think the project's a good idea. If it helps the children that's good isn't it. There's not a father who wouldn't do something to help their children.'

It may also be significant that despite the incorporation of the Da Project into the mainstream activity of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project, the sense that it was at some level a discrete piece of work, with a specific rationale and aims may have helped both parents and staff to identify and talk about it. By containing the work under the label of the Da Project staff and women seemed able to keep it separate from and protect their existing professional relationships, even when they were sometimes temporarily threatened by men's involvement. For fathers, it seems to have provided a means to identify a specific context in which activities for and with them were contained and with which they could feel some privileged involvement and even ownership.

### 3. Responding to fathers' needs: 'opportunistic' and 'deeper' work

Seizing opportunities to support fathers as they arose was an important part of a relationship and trust building with fathers. In general, given their lack of experience of positive engagement with services and an understandable reluctance to disclose personal needs at the point of initial contact with the Da Project, these were opportunities to offer support in a relatively 'low-key' way. It may even have been that some fathers were creating opportunities to raise 'low-key' issues in order to test the responsiveness, willingness and ability of project staff to help and assess how safe and useful it would be to disclose 'deeper' or more personal needs. Examples of needs raised by fathers included wanting help to ensure that a father received copies of his children's school reports, advice about contact with probation service and help with accessing housing. The underlying motive here was to achieve greater access to and contact with their children by having a home of one's own in which it would be possible for them to come over and stay.

While these needs are straightforward and do not involve a great deal of personal disclosure, in some cases from the outset fathers presented more complex and personal needs and concerns. For example, some wanted help with clarifying how allegations around child protection issues might be resolved. Staff responded to all these concerns, initially by offering to liaise and where appropriate, advocate on behalf of fathers with the other agencies involved. They also offered to help with form-filling and bureaucracy, and outlined procedures and practices that the agencies would be working to and follow.

These instances of support were clearly valued by fathers, however minor they might have seemed. As one said:

'I think it's a good job they're doing ... helping people out with things and that. I mean fair play to them ... they don't have to do this and they're helping us see. I mean of course it's making a difference.'

These interventions also helped to build fathers' confidence in the project and contributed to the development of professional working relationships:

'Well they gave me some help with housing, I think it was. That was nice. I never expected them to help with things like that ... I thought it was really doing things for the children. It makes a difference you know ... I feel like I might be able to ask them again for something.'

In addition, they gave Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff a sense that they were making progress through the Da Project. As one member of staff reflected:

'I think we made a difference, yes. Sometimes it all seemed difficult, like a lot of time and energy and the fathers could be less like, around and engaged than mothers you know. They're more chaotic and disorganised and you can't get to know them so quickly because they're not going to put their problems on the table immediately. But I know that people here have helped with little things ... like phone calls around housing and probation and social workers and explaining what the processes are around child protection issues. The fathers seemed to appreciate that, things being explained and just small ways of showing you're taking their concerns seriously. You definitely feel like you're getting somewhere and also that they've seen you as more of a potential ally.'

Providing support to fathers through opportunistic responses to needs lays the basis for 'deeper' engagement with them and working around more complex and personal issues. This is the work on which the project is just embarking. A significant challenge faced by Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support staff with some fathers is enabling them to identify and articulate their needs on these issues. Examples include finding ways of enabling fathers with addiction issues, especially alcohol abuse, to see the detrimental effect these can have on their own health and well-being and their ability to parent effectively. Other examples include enabling fathers to see the role that their current parenting styles and past experiences play in shaping their relationships with their children.

Importantly, although no easy answers to responding to these challenges were immediately available to project staff they brought them into the context of the reflective process in which they engaged during the second training event and thereby moved towards identifying how they might address them.

#### **4. Maintaining a positive attitude towards involving fathers**

The initial training event shifted Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff attitudes towards to working with fathers and increased their knowledge of the positive benefits that children can derive from increased positive paternal involvement. This gave staff a positive basis on which to approach making contact with and engaging fathers with the Da Project. It also proved to be an important reference point when they faced challenges and difficulties in managing their relationships with fathers and making progress with the work.

Their most common difficulties arose when men behaved or talked inappropriately in groups with other fathers. At these times staff tried hard to understand how the specific circumstances and fathers' experiences and especially their vulnerabilities were influencing their behaviour. For example, when fathers behaved roughly with each other they reflected on the fathers influencing this and concluded that it was important to remember that:

'You have to ... try to understand ... and remember that he loves his kids and that's what we're trying to work with ...'

They also tried to understand that men used some displays of machismo or disrespectful ways of talking about professionals as strategies for coping with services and systems which were not responsive to their needs or respectful of them. In addition, project staff reported trying hard to get beyond some of the labels that were attached to fathers or that they attached to themselves to understand a father's concerns in their own terms. For example, when men were labelled violent or suspected of involvement in children protection concerns, without neglecting their responsibilities towards the children or family involved, the staff tried to create a space in which they could give a detailed account of their concerns and fears and hence put themselves in a position where they could respond with appropriate support.

In addition, staff focused on fathers' positive attributes and stressed the role these could play in their children's development. For example, opportunities to praise fathers for their parenting skills rarely went unendorsed by project staff. For example, this staff member commented on a father's parenting skills:

'He's terrific with his children you know ... he's patient and gentle and manages them really well. [The mother] says that he can get them to do things that they won't do for her.'

Remaining positive also involved staff in accepting their insecurities and lack of confidence about how to deal with some issues raised in working with fathers and to seek support from each other, their management and through supervision. In this way they could understand their experiences and think through the implications for their practice. By planning a second training event for the Da Project they also created a space where they could seek expert support and advice on their developing practice and the challenges it had created.

#### **5. Staffing and management issues**

For much of the life of the Da Project Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project was short-staffed due to staff turnover and recruitment issues. Even with the designation of a project worker to lead the work with fathers the fact that the development of the Da Project involved a more integrated approach to working with families and involving fathers meant that it had an impact on workloads and activities across the whole of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project.

The development of the project in these circumstances has depended on the continued commitment and leadership provided both by management within the project and at a regional level within Barnardos. Good working relationships between Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff have also been important and especially the role played by the supportive collegiate ethos within the staff team.

Staff were also keen to acknowledge the contribution made by the sessional fathers' worker who, despite declining to take up the post, helped to positively influence the course of the work through an honest appraisal of the project's capacity and starting point for change in practice.

Providing training to all the workers involved in Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project was clearly important in enabling the Da Project to develop and also provided a context, through the second training event, in which a new member of staff who came into post during this period, could develop their knowledge, skills and confidence about working with fathers.

Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project was staffed by women during this period and staff reflected on the interesting question of the significance of gender in the delivery of work with fathers. On a few occasions staff felt that having a male worker might have been an advantage, principally because they felt less well-equipped experientially to understand and empathise with fathers. However, for the fathers engaged with the Da Project this was not an issue. For example, when pressed on whether it mattered to him that the project had no male staff one father said:

'I don't think it matters. It's more about the person themselves than whether they're a man or a woman. I think you do treat a woman differently, but it doesn't mean you don't say what you want to say ... you might say it differently that's all. If they had a man he'd have to be the right one ... when you meet them what you want to know is that you know that person a little bit ... that's more important than anything else. I'd rather have no men working there than someone I didn't really know well enough.'

## **Methods and approaches: Promoting positive views of fathers in the community**

The second strand of activity in implementing the Da Project involved work with the wider community to promote positive views of the roles of fathers in family life in order to create a supportive climate in which the interventions with fathers could take place. This work was much more episodic than the interventions with fathers themselves, centring on the following three activities which took place at discrete points in the project's life-cycle:

- The revision of the referral and assessment forms used by Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project;
- Raising awareness of the Da Project and promoting positive views of fathers with other agencies;
- Promoting and celebrating positive views of fathers in the wider community.

The review and revision of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project's referral and assessment forms used to collect information about families was undertaken in October 2004. These forms were amended so that they required referring agencies to provide information about fathers – their relationship to the family, their residency status and so on – information which had not previously been requested. This change signalled the new awareness within Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project on the importance of including fathers in family support work and also aimed to influence the thinking and practices of other organisations. Copies of the revised referral and assessment forms are appended to this report (see appendix III).

Promoting positive images of fathers with other agencies involved distributing posters showing positive images of fathers with children to local services and community groups, advising other Springboard Projects about the Da Project's progress and stimulating members of the Da Project advisory group to raise awareness of the initiative.

Promoting and celebrating positive views of fathers in the wider community was accomplished through the organisation of a Fathers' Day competition. Children in local primary schools and community groups were invited to create artwork and poems celebrating the role of father figures in their lives. This took place between April and June 2005 culminating in an exhibition with a prize-giving ceremony for winning entries on Fathers' Day. It was followed up with the manufacture and distribution of over 6000 copies of a calendar for 2006 containing pictures and poems selected from entries to the competition. Approximately 1500 calendars were distributed to schools which participated in the competition, 200 to local community organisations, 1000 to the community civic centre, 1000 within Barnardos, including the charity shops and the remaining 2500 to people living in Cherry Orchard via door-to-door delivery.

While the impact of the revision of the referral and assessment forms and other awareness raising activities with local agencies is hard to assess, the scope and impact of the Fathers' Day competition is clear.

The competition received over 450 entries, most of which came through the local primary schools. All entries were put on public display in an exhibition held in the Ballyfermot Civic Centre on June 15th-24th 2005. Competition entries were judged by Henry Harding, the Lord Mayor of Ballyfermot, Tony Dennon, a local community worker and member of the Da Project advisory group, and Francis Chance, assistant director children's services, Barnardos. The prize-giving ceremony was held on Fathers' Day, Sunday June 19th, 2005. All the fathers engaged with the Da Project and their families and friends were invited to the prize-giving ceremony and many attended along with over 200 other people including Fergus Finlay the newly appointed chief executive of Barnardos. The competition generated considerable local and national print and television coverage with articles appearing in the Sunday Independent on June 19th, the Irish Independent on June 22nd, the Echo on June 23rd and an item on News2Day, RTE 2. An example of the news coverage is appended to this report (see appendix IV).

Entries in a comments book available for visitors to the prize-giving ceremony and exhibition indicate the impact of the event in terms of bringing to public attention the role that fathers play in their children's lives. For example one entry read:

'Wonderful experience. Never seen anything like this for dads in all my years in Ballyfermot.'

And another:

'Fabulous exhibition. Lucky dads all over Ballyfermot to have children who think so much of them.'

Interviews with representatives of the local primary schools which took part in the competition suggested the event had tapped into a rich seam of concern among pupils and staff. As one teacher explained, addressing fathers and fatherhood was a relatively new experience for the school because it had always been seen as a sensitive subject:

'The children loved it. Fathers have a fairly low profile in school especially since the economy looked up and they aren't around much except at parents' evenings. Also the staff are slightly nervous about raising the issue because so many of the children come from broken homes or have limited contact with their fathers.'

Another added, in a similar vein:

'Maybe people think sub-consciously about mothers ... many families are broken so teachers might have been a reluctant to address the issue without the competition ... we've been shy about doing family trees in the past, for example.'

But engagement in the classroom in painting and drawing and writing about fathers had been deeply moving and positive for teachers and galvanised their interest in pursuing the issues around fathers and father-figures:

'The teachers were moved by it. Some of the children are bereaved and that's never been brought up by the teachers. Think it has galvanised them for next year. Mothers' Day is always big ... all the kids make cards ... but we don't usually celebrate Fathers' Day ... now it's a topic of conversation.'

There were further indications that the competition had stimulated practice in schools around the role of father-figures and fatherhood in children's lives. As one teacher said:

'The older years did some creative writing connected to the competition as an extra ... we'd definitely do something like this again and probably will next year now people's concerns about raising the issue have been allayed.'

These interviews also demonstrated that the organisation of the competition by a trusted, local agency and the incentive of prizes and the display of the work in a locally held exhibition enhanced interest and encouraged teachers to engage with the work:

'I liked the local nature of the competition ... I know Cherry Orchard [Family Support Project] and it's got a good reputation with the school. Because it's local you know the children have got more chance of winning too and with a local exhibition they could go and see their work ... I know lots went to see it and took their fathers and grandfathers. They were really proud.'

And another teacher added:

'The girls [project staff] brought the information sheets [about the competition] in and I worked with each teacher ... I have close contact with Barnardos ... I'm on their committee and look at case review and opening and closing cases, so that made me a good advocate ... Lots of teachers recognised Barnardos as did the children so that helped them to engage with it. There are a lot of community organisations in Ballyfermot but Barnardos has a nice, friendly feeling. Having a local exhibition was another motivation and greater chance of winning than if it had been a national competition.'

For project staff the competition's success, which far exceeded their expectations, was an important reward for all the labour which went into organising it and a significant moment of acknowledgement and celebration of the Da Project. As one member of staff said:

'... it was a nightmare actually. We had problems with getting the prizes donated and then we had to go out and put the exhibition up ourselves. There were so many entries it was frightening. It took hours and hours and we all worked on it ... moving the display boards and sitting here round the kitchen table sticking pictures and labels to them ... but it was amazing and such a moving experience. The poems were lovely and the pictures and so many beautiful things written about fathers and uncles and brothers and granddads. It was all worthwhile, definitely, and it really put fathers on the map in Ballyfermot.'

## Summary: Development and implementation of the Da Project

The Da Project was set up in response to the findings of the National Springboard Evaluation which showed a low engagement of fathers in family support services generally. It was also rooted in research that shows children benefit from increased paternal involvement and better parental relationships.

The Da Project was originally conceived as the delivery of a discrete programme of support to fathers and young men through group work provided by a specialist sessional fathers' worker. This programme was to be coupled with ongoing individual support provided by the sessional fathers' worker with the existing staff employed at Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project. However, project development and implementation took a completely different course in practice largely because of how training affected staff perceptions of which fathers the work might involve, how they might be engaged, and what kind of activities and support provided by the project might help to meet their needs.

The Da Project involved a range of activities to enable Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project to begin to engage with fathers of families attached to the project. The project worked with families and with fathers directly to develop their understanding of the rationale and purpose of the work and lay the foundations for ongoing, in-depth support work. Alongside this the project promoted positive images of fathers and fathering within the local community and with other organisations to create a supportive climate for the work with families and fathers.

There were seven main elements to the project:

- All Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff received training on working with fathers from an experienced external trainer;
- Project staff worked with the evaluator on a series of consultations with mothers, children and fathers to determine their views on fathers and fathering and to help identify fathers' needs in achieving greater involvement with their children;
- The project changed some organisational practices for assessment and referral so that fathers were included from the start of project engagement with families;
- Project staff profiled fathers in the families they worked with to identify potential recruits to the Da Project and contacted them and their families;
- The project provided a rolling programme of social activities for fathers and for fathers and their children to engage and build trust and rapport with fathers;
- Project staff began to provide individual support to some fathers on a 'deeper' level through casework;
- The project promoted positive images of fathers and fathering by organising a Fathers' Day event where children celebrated the role of father-figures in their lives through a creative art and writing competition, and collated a selection of the entries into a calendar which was then distributed to local schools, agencies and across the Cherry Orchard community.

Implementation of the work highlighted important considerations including:

- The need for flexibility on the part of funders, management and staff in working with men, both in terms of when and where the work takes place and what it comprises;
- The need to be ready to mediate with mothers, especially when they are separated from the fathers of their children, to ensure that they are fully aware of the engagement of fathers with the project and understand its purpose and what it consists of;
- The need to generate a clear and easily understood description of the work's purpose which all staff can sign up to;
- The importance of focusing on fathers' primary motivations for engagement (largely having more contact with their children);
- The importance of remaining positive about fathers and trying to understand that challenging behaviour may be a response to coping with the difficulties they face as fathers and/or men;
- The increase in workload and demands on staff which working with fathers can generate.

## Outcomes

It is important to view the outcomes of the Da Project in the context in which the work was developed. We know that:

- There is little specific work undertaken with fathers in Ireland;
- Family support services have had little contact or engagement with fathers;
- Staff in family support projects lack confidence and competency around working with fathers and may have negative views about the role of fathers in family life;
- The procedures and practices developed by family support services may contribute to the marginalisation of fathers in the assessment of families' needs and lead to their exclusion from the provision of support;
- Family support services may have a low profile with fathers and they may be reluctant to access them because they can be seen as primarily supporting mothers and children and even as 'anti-men';
- Family support work involves a long-term investment in engagement with families with casework with families usually lasting around two to three years.

In this context the Da Project was set up to engage more fathers with Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project. This evaluation showed that in the 15 months between September 2004 and December 2005 the Da Project achieved the following:

- Increased the proportion of families which Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project has some contact with fathers from 21 per cent to 50 per cent. In September 2004 the project had contact with six fathers of the 29 connected to the families that they were working with. In December 2005 the project had contact with 12 fathers of the 24 connected to the families they were working with.
- The nature of the project's engagement with fathers has also changed. It has increased the proportion of fathers with whom it either is engaged in in-depth case work or providing support to from 7 per cent to 30 per cent. In September 2004 the project engaged in in-depth casework or provided support to two fathers of the 29 connected to the families that Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project was working with compared to eight fathers connected to the 24 families it was working with in December 2005.
- The proportion of families in which there has been no involvement with fathers fell from around 80 per cent in September 2004 to 50 per cent in December 2005.

These data suggest that through the Da Project Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project has made progress towards engaging with fathers and begun to deliver in-depth casework and support to about a third of all the fathers in families connected with the project.

Work is still at an early stage, however, with half of all the fathers in families connected with the project still to be engaged. At this point the Da Project has not fully met its aim of developing programmes of work with fathers but has laid the basis on which these can be developed.

The focus of the work so far has been on:

- Training Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project staff to become more aware of the potential benefits to children of fathers' greater involvement with them and to develop positive attitudes and increased confidence in engaging with fathers;
- The implementation of a programme of social activities for fathers and fathers and children to bring fathers into contact with the project and provide the basis for forming working relationships with project staff;
- Taking opportunities presented through this contact between fathers and project staff to respond to fathers' immediate concerns and needs;
- Promoting positive images of fathers and fathering in the local community to raise awareness of the project and create a positive climate in which this work can take place.

Despite the developmental stage at which the work is this evaluation has identified important outcomes for Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project, for fathers and for families and children.

The main outcomes for Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project include:

- The project has developed practices and procedures to include fathers from the start of family engagement and do not contribute to their marginalisation or collude with their exclusion from family support;
- A cultural change has taken place within so that new staff entering the project find it one in which engagement with fathers is the norm in developing services and support for children and families;
- New families entering the project experience the Da Project as an integrated piece of work;
- It is now a more father-friendly environment which fathers access and use and view more positively;
- It is seen by other agencies and within the wider community as a promoter of positive views of fathers and fatherhood issues;

Staff within Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project:

- Have received training which has increased their knowledge and understanding of the potential benefits that greater paternal involvement can bring to children, provided them with information and skills around contacting and engaging fathers and helped them to develop a positive attitude towards working with them;
- Now regard contacting, engaging and working with fathers as a normal and essential part of their practice of providing family support;
- Staff have been able to positively engage and recruit fathers to a variety of social and other activities dedicated to fathers and fathers and their children;
- Are confident about undertaking advocacy and support work on behalf of individual fathers with other agencies and organisations;
- Are developing their capacity and confidence to undertake individual casework with fathers.

For fathers, this evaluation showed that the main outcomes of the Da Project have been:

- Increased positive contact between fathers and children, particularly those men not living with their families;
- At least six fathers feel their attitudes towards welfare and support services have been altered through their contact with the project;
- And at least five fathers have received practical support with liaising with other agencies;
- At least two fathers have received support through engagement in in-depth individual casework.

For children and families the main outcomes have been:

- For children in at least nine families, the quality of their contact with their fathers has increased;
- Mothers' awareness of the potentially beneficial role that paternal involvement can play in children's development has been raised;
- Mothers' desires for fathers to achieve greater positive involvement with children has been acknowledged and supported, and even where this did initially stir up difficulties in relationships between mothers and fathers, particularly where they were separated, these have been addressed;
- And particularly through the Fathers' Day competition, children and families have been able to celebrate their relationships with significant male figures in their lives.

For the wider community outcomes have included:

- Raised awareness of the importance of fathers and father figures to children;
- Discussion and debate have been stimulated about the role of fathers in the care and upbringing of the children in the mass media;
- Practice in talking about fathers and fathering within local schools has been stimulated;
- Awareness of the importance of fathers to family support work has been raised with other agencies.

## **Future development of the Da Project**

In October 2005 project staff attended a second two-day training event which focused on reflection and review of the learning acquired through delivering the Da Project and planning the work's future development. This consisted of two days of intensive group discussion and reflection on three substantive issues:

- Charting the development of the Da Project;
- Recording the learning accrued through implementing the work;
- Identifying challenges and the next steps for the project.

The programme was constructed through negotiations between the evaluator, the trainer and Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project management and staff and all were participants in it. The training event clarified important learning about undertaking work with fathers in the context of family support which formed the basis for an elaboration of future plans. In terms of project development participants in the training identified the following:

- The original proposal/project not being implemented led to a more holistic, inclusive, integrated, solid development in work practice;
- The work became a *process* not a *project* and was internalised into organisational working practices;

In terms of organisational change they identified that:

- A positive father inclusive-approach is adopted in all aspects of the work in Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project;
- Work with fathers responds to the legal requirements in the equality field (gender is one of the nine categories of equality policy for Barnardos and Irish equality legislation);
- It is important to have agency backing for the work and the learning acquired now needs to go to the centre of the Barnardos organisation;
- It is important to be aware of the implications of gender balance in the workplace;
- Funders, managers and project staff need to be flexible in negotiating the most effective ways of supporting and developing work with fathers in the context of family support projects.

On practice issues for working with fathers and families they highlighted:

- The importance of the initial training in staff and organisational development;
- That staff have learnt how to interact with men at their level and in response to their needs;
- The need for flexibility in terms of engaging and working with fathers:
  - i.e. meeting them in public places
  - responding to the needs of individual fathers
  - letting them set the agenda
- Acknowledging that interaction between some fathers and their children can be very positive;
- That significantly more fathers were available to be involved with their children than was initially assumed;
- Explaining the process and the reasons for fathers to be more involved was understood by the vast majority of the mothers who therefore supported fathers' involvement in the project;
- Taking time to stay with the process for the mother as she comes to terms with the father's involvement;
- That male members of staff are not essential for integrated work, but that male presence in the workforce may have benefits and might be achieved in others ways, for example through volunteers and trainee/placement staff;
- The need to train all the staff and to induct new staff in working with fathers and follow that process back at work;
- Having an induction pack for working with fathers would be useful.

In terms of practice issues in relation to working with the wider community they identified:

- The power of children's art and poetry work for raising awareness in the community;
- The groundswell of support for Fathers' Day activity – it took very little to stimulate schools' involvement;
- That the community is receptive to the message that fathers are important in children's lives and is prepared to talk about it.

## **Areas for development**

Drawing on these conclusions about the learning derived from developing and implementing, Da Project staff proposed a plan for the next year.

This consisted of:

- Sustaining and building on the momentum generated by the Da Project and ensuring that working with fathers remains a working ethos;
- Ensuring that the eligibility of all fathers for engagement in the Da Project is assessed and where a decision is made not to engage them the reasons for this are explicitly recorded;
- Agreeing that the Da Project has become a process that has been integrated into all aspects of the work with children and families.

To fulfil these aims project staff and management agreed to set the following specific objectives:

- To develop methods of engagement with fathers which enable them to deepen their professional relationships and strengthen their capacity to respond to fathers' specific needs;
- Treat new fathers engaged by the project in line with the Da Project values and practice;
- Disseminate the learning acquired through the Da Project locally, throughout Barnardos and elsewhere;
- Ensure that, at a later date, there is another opportunity to take a step back and look at achievements, identify new skills development needs and plan the next steps;
- Explore what induction processes are required to equip any new project staff to participate in the work.

They also had an opportunity to look at challenging areas of practice with fathers and begin to generate ideas about responses. The three main issues raised were working with alcoholism, mental health issues and allegations of child abuse. Project staff and management developed the following list of general principles for developing work with fathers on these issues:

- Children are the focus of the work and involvement with fathers is underpinned by awareness of what will benefit the child;
- Being clear about professional and organisational boundaries and addressing with fathers where their behaviour (particularly drinking) oversteps or challenges them;
- Trying to help fathers to focus on the root causes of their problems and to identify the negative effects these have on them and their families;
- Not trying to resolve issues which cannot be resolved but to ensure that fathers and families attend to what can be addressed, for example, the quality of relationship between parents;
- Ensuring that work with fathers is not conducted in isolation from work with the rest of the family.

## **Recommendations**

The second training event demonstrated a clear commitment at practice and management levels to continuing to develop the Da Project as part of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project provision to the local community.

In clarifying the nature and scope of that commitment Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project team and management were able to develop the following statement on the purpose of the work and its relationship to the existing project's aims.

The Da Project recognises the important role that fathers play in their children's lives and aims to nurture and support fathers to achieve and increase the contact between them and their children and the quality of these relationships and to support staff in learning to achieve this.

This sits within the broader aims of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project (which may need revisiting) which is to promote inclusiveness:

- working with the family as a unit whether they live together or not because, as recent research has shown, this has benefits for the child;
- endeavouring to enhance family relationships with the child's best interests at heart.

This statement of purpose for the Da Project provides the context within which the following recommendations are framed.

On the basis of the findings of this evaluation the focus of activity over the next year should fall on sustaining the momentum generated and developing the work from a point of engagement with some fathers to achieving engagement with all those that can be contacted, and who meet the project's criteria, and developing focused, in-depth support to those already engaged in order to improve their relationships with their children and their families.

To meet these aims it is recommended that: Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project should engage with all willing fathers connected with families linked to the project that can be contacted who meet the project's criteria.

That it continues to develop its work with those fathers by:

- Adopting a framework for assessing the needs of fathers which focuses on identifying the support they need to play a positive role in the lives of the children;
- Ensuring that effective monitoring and evaluation processes and procedures are in place so that the outcomes for fathers and families are assessed;
- Identifying a member of staff with responsibility for leading the work, while maintaining responsibility for all staff members to work in a father-inclusive way;
- To continue to develop the work with fathers at a deeper level.

In addition, consideration should be given to supporting further work with the local community including:

Providing feedback, in an appropriate form, on the findings of this evaluation to relevant organisations, agencies and individuals in the local community to continue to promote a father-inclusive approach within the community.

This evaluation has highlighted important learning points for family support services trying to develop their provision so that it is more inclusive of fathers. A secondary aim should be to disseminate this learning to other family support projects provided by Barnardos so they may move to a position where they positively engage with more fathers and have laid the foundations for the provision of more focused, in-depth support.

This work needs to take place with a recognition that family support projects begin from a low starting point in terms of their engagement with and accessibility and acceptability to fathers. There may need to be a high level of initial investment in order to reach a point where programmes of support and in-depth casework with fathers can be developed and implemented. In addition, because the processes involved in moving from this low starting point to a position where a family support service can engage with fathers are developmental, project funders, managers and workers need to be flexible about what the work will involve.

To meet the aim of bringing all family support projects provided by Barnardos to a point where they can develop programmes of in-depth work with fathers it is recommended that:

- The findings of this evaluation are disseminated to all Barnardos family support projects;
- Referral and assessment mechanisms used by all projects are reviewed and revised to ensure that information on the father(s) of the children in the family, their residency status and level of involvement in their children's lives is systematically gathered with each new referral;
- Targets are established for all projects to improve the 'father-friendliness' of their provision;
- That they are supported in doing this through the provision of a resource which describes the steps involved in improving their appeal and accessibility to men;
- That all Barnardos family support projects are encouraged to engage in an activity with their local community celebrating Fathers' Day 2007/2008.

# Appendices

## Appendix I: Programme for the initial staff training event

- Personal stories;
- 'What do we need to keep in mind when working with fathers';
- Understanding fathers;
- Research and policy context;
- Creating a supportive environment when working with men;
- What works / what doesn't work;
- Notions of success;
- Primary and secondary outcomes for the Da Project;
- Criteria for participation / who is eligible;
- Ideas on content and structure;
- Next steps;
- Evaluation.

Appendix I – Programme for the initial staff training event

Appendix II – Father's questionnaire

Appendix III – Revised referral and assessment forms

Appendix IV – Media coverage of the Cherry Orchard Family Support Project Fathers Day event 2005.

## Appendix II: Father's Questionnaire

*This is in questionnaire format however you should make it as conversational as possible.  
Remember that asking questions is about building the relationship not getting the answers.*

We want to find out more about how we can involve fathers in our family support project.

At the project we offer various supports to children and families. These include:

- Individual work with children;
- Individual / support work with parents;
- Group work with children / parents;
- Home visits;
- Home-based practical support.

Often children, mothers and fathers need different kind of supports. Mothers and children tend to prefer the above supports. We would like to find from you what you think fathers want / need.

Name: .....

Address: .....

Contact: .....

Question 1	How many children do you have?
Question 2	What are your hopes for your children?
Question 3	What kind of life would you like your children have?
Question 4	What are your worries / concerns for your children?

	<p>At this point give the fathers some facts about dads:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fathers provide care and protection for their teenagers by undertaking many low key activities, such as ferrying them from place to place;</li> <li>When fathers are involved with their children before the age of 11, the children are more likely to escape having a criminal record by the age of 21;</li> <li>Non-resident fathers often have a strong presence in their children's lives.</li> </ul> <p>Just because a father does not live with his child, it does not mean he is uninvolved with them.</p> <p>The research finds that seven out of 10 non-resident fathers have contact with their children.</p>
Question 5	<p>Are you interested in attending any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trips for fathers and children;</li> <li>A talk on child development;</li> <li>A talk on how fathers can be of use to their children;</li> <li>Discussion groups with other fathers;</li> <li>Outings with other fathers.</li> </ul>
Question 6	<p>Would you like Barnardos to put on a one-day event for fathers and their children?</p>
Question 7	<p>What would you like that to be?</p>
Question 8	<p>Would you be interested in receiving any support from the project?</p>
Question 9	<p>Do you have any other ideas, suggestion or comments?</p>

Thank you for meeting us. We would like to come back to you to let you know about the ideas and suggestion other fathers had.

See you soon.

## Appendix III: Revised referral and assessment forms

### BARNARDOS CHERRY ORCHARD FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECT: REFERRAL FORM

Family being referred: .....

Address: .....

Phone No.: .....



Child's name	D.O.B	Mother's name	Mother's address /contact details	Father's name	Father's address /contact details

Note: Please give name of legal guardian and relationship to child if different from above:

.....

If one or both parents are absent from the home, please indicate how often they see their child/ren?

.....

Reason for referral: .....

.....

.....

Other agencies involved with family:

Agency	Contact person	Contact tel:	Agency	Contact person	Contact tel:
1.			2.		

I agree to my family being referred to Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project and consent to Barnardos contacting me

Signed: (Parent / guardian): .....

Date: .....

Signed: (Parent / guardian): .....

Date: .....

Referring worker / agency .....

Contact Details: .....

## Appendix IV: Media coverage of Barnardos Cherry Orchard Family Support Project Fathers' Day event, 2005

Sunday Independent, 19th June 2005

Fathers are a 'huge untapped resource' for their children

NICOLA TALLANT

A LEADING children's charity is urging fathers to get involved in their children's lives - and stamp out the risk of poor school performance and involvement in crime.

Barnardos are set to target dads all over the country to take an active role in the lives of their sons and daughters in a bid to alleviate juvenile crime and curb the "McDonald's dad" syndrome. The charity have just set up its first fathers' parenting programme in Dublin's Ballyfermot and now hopes to set up similar schemes around the country.

Barnardos Assistant Director of Children's Services, Francis Chance, says fathers are one of the most under-utilised resources in a family.

He says dads are a vital authority figure in a child's life - they help to improve school grades and keep the child out of trouble.

"Where there is a low level of engagement of the father in a child's life, there is a greater risk of that child performing badly in school and getting involved in anti-social behaviour. In our own services provided for parents most of the participants are mothers and not fathers, which speaks volumes itself. As a result we have set up our first fathers parenting programme as a pilot scheme with 25 participants. We hope to make this available throughout the country in a bid to encourage fathers to get involved," he said.

"This weekend we organised an art competition for Father's Day and had 300 entries, which is an indication of how it is already impacting on the community."

Mr Chance says Barnardos have been given considerable research to show that father figures improve future performances by children.

"There is an element of fathers being seen as an authority figure in a family - which is not a bad thing, although it is a stereotype."

"Fathers can be fantastic role models for their children, and we hope to give pointers to parents as to how they can best be that. We would like to get away from the 'McDonald's dads' who don't know what else to do with their kids than bring them to a fast-food joint. It certainly does still occur - in particular in families where the relationship has split up and the fathers only have limited access to their children."

"But just because a father isn't living in the home doesn't mean that he shouldn't have an active involvement in every aspect of his child's life. Barnardos are going to be working directly with fathers, while we also hope to create a positive image in the community of fathers."

"We are currently doing a poster campaign where we are putting up pictures of fathers and their children having fun together as a starting point for positive thinking when it comes to fathering. "Fathers are huge untapped sources of support for families. In many cases they are out of the fold and need to be re-engaging in the family and seen as an ally when it comes to children."

"In other cases they are in the family but their existence as a father is ignored. We need to find ways to tap into them and create a win-win situation for the child."

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Barnardos' vision is an Ireland  
where childhood is valued and all  
children and young people are  
cherished equally.

Barnardos' mission is to challenge  
and support families, communities,  
society and government to make  
Ireland the best place in the world  
to be a child, focusing specifically  
on children and young people  
whose well-being is under threat.