

# Recognising Fathers

A National Conference exploring the issues faced  
by fathers of children with a learning disability



21 November 2006 - London EC4

Foundation for People  
with Learning Disabilities

# Recognising Fathers

The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities is holding an innovative conference to present the research findings from Recognising Fathers - a project looking at the experiences of fathers of young children with learning disabilities. Delegates will explore the impact that being the father of a child with a learning disability has on a man's life and how services can develop their practice to involve and engage dads. The programme will cover policy and research on fathers and family life, and being the father of a child dependent on technology. The day will conclude with a Q&A panel hosted by TV presenter Adrian Chiles.

The Recognising Fathers project was set up in 2005 in response to findings from the Foundation's First Impressions project. Fathers have an important role in dealing with the pressures faced by the families of children with learning disabilities. Family support is usually geared towards mothers and men often feel excluded from discussions about their children and from sources of support.

During the project we carried out in-depth interviews with fathers about their experience as providers of care and support to their families and as breadwinners. We will present our findings about the support fathers value and how professionals' interactions with fathers can lead men to feel recognised and included as part of their children's support network.

## Programme

10.00	Welcome and introduction to the day by Professor Barry Carpenter.
10.15	Why Recognise Fathers: the national policy and research context Keynote presentation by Professor Margaret O'Brien, Co-Director of the Centre for Research on the Child and Family at the University of East Anglia.
10.45	Recognising Fathers: understanding the issues faced by fathers of children with a learning disability. Presentation of findings from a national research project by Christine Towers.
11.15	Break
11.30	Morning workshops
12.30	Lunch
1.30	The experience of being the father of a technology dependent child. Keynote presentation by Gavin Cross.
2.00	Afternoon workshops
3.00	Tea
3.15	Panel chaired by Adrian Chiles talking to fathers involved in the project. The panel will reflect on the day and the key messages to be taken away from it. The audience will be invited to make their own contributions.
3.50	Closing remarks by Barry Carpenter
4.00	Close

# Speaker Biographies

## **Professor Barry Carpenter OBE**

Barry is Chief Executive of Sunfield, a national charity for children with autistic spectrum disorders/intellectual disabilities. He is also Honorary Professor of Early Childhood Intervention at the University of Worcester (the first such Chair in the UK). In addition to being a father of a child with special educational needs himself, Barry has worked with families throughout his career in education. Barry runs annual workshops for fathers at Sunfield, and is Chair of the 'Recognising Fathers' advisory committee.

## **Gavin Cross**

As the father of a child with complex needs, Gavin decided to make a significant career change in order to provide the support his son needed. He worked in the north west as an Early Support Project Manager. Gavin has been involved with the Recognising Fathers project as a member of the Advisory Committee.

## **Christine Towers**

Christine has managed the 'Recognising Fathers' project at the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities. She has developed and managed support services for people with learning disabilities and their families. Previously she has been involved in national research projects on Person Centred Planning and Direct Payments.

## **Margaret O'Brien**

Margaret O'Brien is Professor of Child and Family Studies and Co-Director of the Centre for Research on the Child and Family at the University of East Anglia. She was one of the early figures in fatherhood research in the UK, founding the Fatherhood Research Group and co-editing two influential books *The Father Figure* (1982) with Lorna McKee and *Reassessing Fatherhood* (1987) with Charlie Lewis.

## Workshop Programme

### **Addressing the needs of fathers from minority ethnic communities**

Prithvi Perepa from the National Autistic Society will explore different attitudes towards disability in various communities and its impact on family; factors that could hinder fathers from approaching services; and possible strategies to provide a 'father friendly' service.

### **Balancing work and family life - how fathers can be supported**

Janet Mearns, Disability Adviser from the 'Waving not Drowning' Project at Working Families will explore the rights of working fathers and how to support them in their role as carers of children with a disability. It will look at how these rights work in practice and the barriers to fathers using them. Participants will gain an understanding about supporting fathers to combine paid work with involvement with their children.

### **Fathers supporting each other**

Rob Leonard, a father of 3 children including a son with multiple physical and learning disabilities, will explore the value of fathers being able to provide support to each other. Some men find it hard to talk about their situation, but can gain support from talking to and learning from other fathers in a similar situation. Participants will gain ideas about how this can be facilitated.

### **Getting fathers involved in early years settings**

Tim Kahn and Nicky Young from the Pre-school Learning Alliance will lead this workshop examining the barriers which impede the involvement of fathers in early years settings and explore solutions. The Alliance has carried out research and run pilot projects on the involvement of fathers in early year's settings, as well as having been active in helping settings develop their practice for including children with special needs.

### **How services can engage fathers**

Chris Walker, Vice-chair of the National Portage Association, will look at the elements of the Portage home visiting service which provide opportunities to build up relationships with fathers in the early years and give them a valued role in their child's development. The model of service is often valued by fathers as it brings information into the home, provides play activities structured around the home environment and supports the whole family. This workshop will explore the ways in which lessons can be learnt from fathers' involvement in Portage to support other services to deliver a 'father-friendly' service.

# Recognising Fathers - Booking Form

I would like to attend the Recognising Fathers Conference on 21 November 2006 at Mermaid House, Blackfriars, London EC4V 3DB.

Mr / Mrs / Miss / Ms / Other

First name

Surname

Job title

Organisation

Address

Telephone

Email

Special requirements (diet, access and communication)

## Payment

- Statutory sector rate: £176.25 (£150 + VAT)
- Voluntary sector rate: £117.50 (£100 + VAT)
- Fathers/Carers rate: £29.40 (£25 + VAT)
- I enclose a cheque for £..... made payable to the Mental Health Foundation
- Please invoice my organisation, quoting purchase order no. ....
- Please charge my credit / debit card:

Card type: Visa / Mastercard / American Express / Switch / Maestro / Delta Card Security no.

-  -  -   (Switch / Maestro only)

Valid from date  -  E xpiry date  -  (Switch / Maestro Issue No.)

**Please select two workshops from the list below. We will endeavour to meet everyone's preferences (subject to demand).**

Workshop	
Addressing the needs of fathers from minority ethnic communities	
Balancing work and family life - how fathers can be supported	
Fathers supporting each other	
Getting fathers involved in early years settings	
How services can engage fathers	

Payment is required in advance. The cost includes refreshments and associated materials. Confirmation and venue details will be sent to you once we have received your booking. Cancellations must be in writing two weeks prior to the conference date. We regret that refunds cannot be made after this date but are happy to accept substitute delegates.

**Please complete the booking form details and return to:**

**Gillian McEwan, Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities**  
**Sea Containers House, 20 Upper Ground, London SE1 9QB**  
**Email: gmcewan@fpld.org.uk - Tel: 0207 8031159 - Fax: 0207 8031111**

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