

The father figures project



evaluation



**Report prepared for
The Father Figures Project
by**

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.... call it a Utility room. This is my Father Figures room. It's where I can go when I need support. A group of guys who are my cement, plaster and paint. It started as a small room but like Dr Who's tardis once inside it goes on forever. This is the room I use to help repair my life.

(Father Figures client, 2004)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 Introduction

The Father Figures Project commissioned Sheffield Hallam University to carry out the evaluation. Julia Hirst at the School of Social Sciences and Law designed and carried out the research. Pamela Fisher, Research Associate at the Centre for Social Inclusion (CSI) conducted & wrote the literature review and policy context. The evaluation took place during the period December 2003 to June 2004. It centred on developments in the period April 2003-2004 though data from the start of the project (April 2000) are included.

The evaluation drew on several data sources:

- current and ex-client perspectives through observation of group work, analysis of film and creative writing and telephone interviews
- group and individual interviews with The Father Figures Project team
- interviews with a range of representatives from organisations and agencies who are involved with The Father Figures Project as members of the Advisory Group or as referring agencies
- documentary evidence
- analysis of baseline data with regard to levels of referral and engagement and meeting project targets
- critical review of relevant literature and policy documents.

Findings from the evaluation have been disseminated at 2 events: the Interim Findings Day, 22 April 2004 and The Father Figures Project Evaluation Conference to share final findings, 15 July 2004.

2 Development of The Father Figures Project

Father Figures was initially set up by Nacro in April 2000 as a two year action research project. The local context was one in which there was a legacy of provision that prioritised the primary carer (mainly women), scant recognition of the important influence men have, or can have, in children's lives, and lack of familiarity with fathers and fatherhood work. In effect, work with fathers was largely uncharted territory. This rendered challenges but also opportunities that have seen the project evolve enormously into a multidisciplinary, social, therapeutic, creative arts-based service that supports the needs of fathers and fills a gap in earlier provision. Concomitantly, shifts in cultural discourse and national policy (see literature review) have drawn attention to the significance of fathers in children's lives and the need for work specifically targeting

fathers. Father Figures is now one of a number of agencies across the country that have transformed approaches to working with fathers and has innovated to reflect best practice guidelines as spearheaded by the *Fathers Direct* organisation (Burgess and Bartlett, 2004). As well as developing provision for fathers, Father Figures is credited with changing the local culture to one that is beginning to give greater recognition to work with fathers and widen the agenda so that parenting strategy is explicitly inclusive of fathers.

It is concluded that the project has made considerable progress since it began in April 2000 with the appointment of its full time Co-ordinator. During the ensuing two years, the Co-ordinator set up the project, networked with potential partners and referring agencies, secured the involvement of three group work facilitators from external agencies (Centre for HIV and Sexual Health, 'C'mon Everybody' and 'Kickstart' Drug Project), provided various support and education initiatives for fathers and their families (with group facilitator/s) and shared project developments via presentations and other events. This occurred in the absence of routine administrative support. In July 2002, the Project Administrator (3 days/week) and Outreach and Development Worker (2 days/week) commenced work at the project. A freelance writer began work with the project (1 day/week) in September 2002 (to date), and the Boys and Young Men's Worker from the Centre for HIV and Sexual Health jointly facilitated group work from March 2001 to January 2003. The Outreach and Development Worker left the project in August 2003. In October 2003, two new Outreach and Development Workers (2 days each) were appointed, the Project Administrator became full time and the Project Co-ordinator became part time (3 day/week).

From April 2002 to March 2004 the 'Family Policy Unit' (formerly Home Office, now DfES) and the Lloyds TSB Foundation have funded Father Figures. During this period the Trust for the Study of Adolescence has funded work with young fathers (under 25 years) and Sheffield First for Safety has funded this evaluation of the project. In the current financial year, the project has received funds from The Children's Fund (via Darnall and Tinsley On Track). Nacro have approved a budget deficit to cover the contracts of the project Administrator and the two Outreach Workers until the end of September 2004, and Project Co-ordinator until March 2005. This is based on a proviso that by September 2004, either new funding will be identified or contracts will not be extended. The project is actively engaged in trying to identify new funding streams for funding until April 2007.

Funding to date has supported Father Figures to target provision on fathers and fatherhood (i.e. ring fenced funding). To preserve the work specifically targeted at fathers (and this includes that with partners and children) this strategy should be continued at least in the medium term.

Key stakeholders should consider possibilities for routine (3 year) core funding to Father Figures and/or funding of specific initiatives (detailed in recommendations). Joint funding should also be identified for a consultancy exercise to review inter-agency needs and plan a strategy for the next 3-5 years.

The strategy for individual line management, budget management, administration and co-ordination of the programme is transparent. Nacro is the managing agency and takes 17% of all funds raised by Father Figures to cover Nacro's responsibility for human resource issues, IT support, line management of the project co-ordinator, process salary and expenditure payments and support fund raising for Father Figures. From the evaluator's perspective, this arrangement has not been fully functional and is perhaps unsurprising since Nacro is based in London which makes IT support and line management, in particular, rather difficult to achieve. Mechanisms for more effective support from Nacro warrant inquiry and review. Participants in the evaluation have also questioned Father Figures wider relationship to Nacro; given that Father Figures is family support oriented and Nacro is a crime reduction charity this can create anomalies in mission and (for some clients and stakeholders) tensions and stigma in the association with the crime reduction agenda. Both organisations would benefit from consultation and debate on the issues this raises for strategy and practice.

The project is supported by an Advisory Group. The effectiveness of the Advisory Group in attracting key senior managers and strategists to enhance networking, position the project in city wide strategy and identify funding is under scrutiny. Poor attendance of some members is a key factor. The membership and purpose of the Advisory group warrants review. The process should be informed by wider consultation with key strategy groups and organisations in the city.

The project's main components are: the provision of a dedicated support service for fathers; networking with statutory and voluntary services to develop referral mechanisms and inter-agency working and promote deeper understanding of fathers and their needs; working with existing agencies and strategy groups to position Father Figures in mainstream policy and practice; and identifying sources of funding for the project. Key features are one to one

emotional and practical support, counselling, weekly group work (3 groups), creative arts activities, advocacy, support for social services related issues and court proceedings, entitlements advice, sign-posting to other agencies and monthly family socials. The majority of work is undertaken with fathers. Some partners/mothers also participate on an *ad hoc* basis in counselling and one-to-one support visits. Where possible, fathers attend social activities with their children and partners.

Fathers access the project service via self-referral or professional referrals (from various agencies across the city). During the period 2002-4 the project received 128 referrals via 44 different routes. The target of 40 referrals for the period April 2003-4 has been exceeded with a total of 81 new referrals. The number of self-referrals has risen from 5 in 2002-3 to 13 in 2003-4. Forty five clients are currently engaged in ongoing one to one support. This represents a three fold increase on the previous year. Twenty five clients are involved in the support group and 20 in the creative group work. Engagement varies from a single one off meeting to those who have been engaged for over 2 years. The most frequent category of engagement is 3-5 months, and the average (median) length of engagement is 6 months.

The project has strong administrative support. The past 12 months have seen the project devise new data capture and tracking systems that are flexible to the emergent requirements of clients, funders, partner agencies and key stakeholders (e.g. data on ethnicity, employment status). This also provides quantitative measures of progress (growth of client base and level of provision).

The client referral system has been simplified so is less time consuming for external (referring) agencies; new referrals are contacted within 7-14 days.

3 *Impact and Effectiveness*

The Father Figures Project is achieving its aims to provide a city wide support service for fathers and develop mechanisms for partnership, referral and liaison with key partner agencies.

For clients, the type of provision offered and the relationship with Father Figures staff is very important; provision *per se* is less significant to their sustained engagement than the quality and type of interaction. All claims made by the project on the intentions and effects of provision are supported by the evidence disclosed by clients.

The support offered by Father Figures is instrumental in enhancing fathers' sense of self, self-esteem, communication skills and ultimately their role and identity as fathers. Fathers who were referred to Father Figures because of difficulties in their children's behaviour report improvements in abilities to work effectively with their children.

Significant to this success is the unique model of provision developed by Father Figures. This is holistic, visionary, flexible, adaptable, responsive, therapeutic, needs-led and unusual in its creative, expressive arts-based-approach. The variety of types of provision offered is effective in meeting a plethora of needs. Partner agencies interviewed believe this unique model of provision is significant to its success.

Testament to the success of Father Figures is that it was selected by The Trust for the Study of Adolescence (TSA) as one of five pilots to be included in its Action Research Project on Young Dads.

The project incorporates visioning in its planning and has identified key priorities for the future. These include developing (i) training and consultancy initiatives on work with fathers (ii) on-going work with young fathers and (iii) work with individuals and groups from minority ethnic backgrounds.

While it is recommended that Father Figures retains its current model of practice and portfolio of provision, its potential for effective expansion and sustained funding will be enhanced by the ability to demonstrate flexibility and adaptability, in response to stakeholders requirements and changing policy priorities (i.e. meeting market demands). It is recommended that Father Figures builds in time and resources to review the options and plan accordingly. The portfolio of service that Father Figures can offer should be disseminated to stakeholders. Financial projections should include the funding of time for review and planning and a contingency to fund the time required to respond to unanticipated external projects/consultancy etc.

Father Figures regard partnership with other agencies as the backbone to success. Of the external agencies interviewed, Father Figures is credited with raising the profile of fathers, positively influencing perceptions of fathers and their significance to the success of families and parenting, enhancing awareness of the experiences and needs of fathers, and widening the holistic agenda of needs. Some external agencies assert that if Father Figures were to cease existence, this would create a gap in provision. It is unclear

whether or how mainstream providers could meet the gap in provision.

Interviews with The Father Figures Project team highlight their recognition of other types of work with fathers that are currently taking place in the city (e.g. Sure Start Schemes). However, while external agencies recognise that Father Figures provides a type of service that is not available from other agencies, some suggest that support offered by other agencies should be more readily acknowledged by Father Figures in local and national networking arenas. It is argued that strategies for meeting short-term operational objectives are not helped by criticisms that have allegedly been levelled at mainstream services. This is salient in terms of where, with whom and how the project pitches strategically and a mutually supportive inter-agency strategy that campaigns for fathers in *all* services is likely to be more effective and therefore recommended.

While recognising the constraints on resources and wider targets that more generic organisations face, it is nevertheless the case that specifically designated support for fathers outside Father Figures is patchy. From the evidence available, routine support (excluding generic family support) appears limited to that provided by Father Figures, North East Active Men and the eight Sure Start schemes in the city. But, of the latter, only two fathers' workers in the Woodthorpe and Wybourn area and a shared men's involvement worker for Southey, Foxhill and Parsons Cross are identifiable, and these cover a wide geographical area. While these are significant developments in provision, recent research (see Hirst, 2003; Hirst, Formby and Burns, 2003) highlights that, with the exception of those involved in Father Figures, there is dissatisfaction with levels of support available to fathers. The potential to remedy this, particularly for young fathers, is not helped by the lack of explicit recognition in the city's teenage pregnancy strategy, that there is no boys' and young men's worker in the city and that Sure Start Plus is based in a women's only unit. Recent constructive discussions between Father Figures and the city's Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator and the latter's intention to gather evidence on boy's and young men's needs and scope of current provision, suggest grounds for optimism in taking this issue forward.

Liaison and sharing of information between Father Figures and other agencies on referred clients is functional though the process is not documented. A system is under development and becoming more routinised to ensure routine documentation of progress and outcomes (on the data base) and dissemination to referring agencies.

Also, to maximise referral rates, some referring agencies recommend joint action with Father Figures to revise referral mechanisms. Some agency representatives report that rates of referral depend on individual practitioner knowledge and prior experience of Father Figures, rather than a clear and agreed agency-wide referral mechanism. Thus, some practitioners do not refer to Father Figures routinely. Service agreements between key partners (e.g. Social Services, Sure Start Plus, Youth Offending Team, Hospital and Home Education Service) might facilitate more enhanced referral rates and support clients in an effective transition to Father Figures. Some agency representatives are unclear on the variety and content of provision offered by Father Figures. This inhibits the potential to capitalise on new insights and develop joint action planning and may impact on rates of referral.

Overall, strategies for information sharing on provision and new developments warrant review to facilitate more effective communication and referral processes. A regular and on-going information sharing and training programme, to facilitate better guarantees of sustainability and partnership with mainstream provision, is recommended.

The capacity of some workers to meet demand is being exceeded. Notably, the Outreach and Development Workers are over-stretched in meeting the increased demand for one-to-one support and networking with existing and new external agencies; and the Project Administrator role is being stretched to meet the needs for more effective data capture systems, identify funding sources, provide reports to funders and maintain routine administrative duties. Consideration of the best approach to meeting current and future demand will need to be given.

Father Figures is making in-roads at local strategy level with the result that fathers are beginning to be explicitly included in action plans e.g. 'Parenting Strategy Group (Sheffield's response to 'Every Child Matters')'. Other organisations and strategy groups/partnerships are encouraged to follow this example. However, this policy recognition is not yet mirrored in funding priorities.

More specifically:

- The project is positively impacting on fathers and their families and is highly valued and much needed by those receiving support
- Father Figures has successfully set up referral mechanisms with a number of key mainstream providers

- Publicity to advertise the project and increase the referral rates has been successful but some believe it requires review in order to target more young men and men from minority ethnic communities
- There are plans to devise a strategy for supported and effective exit from the project. Reason for exit and outcome will be recorded on the new data capture system and feedback to referring agencies
- Peer mentorship initiatives are recommended for consideration. Funding for related training and skills transference could enhance fathers employment potential as well as capacity building to encourage fathers involvement in the project, support other men experiencing difficulties in relationships and parenting and offer mechanisms to access groups and communities who have not previously been involved in fathers work (e.g. Somali Community).

In conclusion, Father Figures operates in a context of national and local debate and policy that is beginning to emphasise the role of fathers in children's lives and their needs for support. In policy and strategy on teen pregnancy and parenting, families and children, the role of mothers is quite rightly highlighted, but, there remains a tendency to implicit recognition of fathers in the terms 'parents' or 'parenting', or fathers are often depicted in economic terms (e.g. as breadwinner). This can diminish the importance of fathers and is argued as contributing to the slow pace of recognition of fathers in local policy, strategy and funding priorities.

4 *Points for Action*

Consideration should be given to the following issues:

- Strategies for funding and sustainability after August 2004
- Remit, representativeness and functioning of the Advisory Group. At least one father should be a member of the Advisory Group
- Debate relationship of Father Figures to Nacro and effectiveness of Nacro central service support
- Explore potential to fund peer support mentorship initiative and supported exit strategy
- Explore provision for fathers from minority ethnic communities
- Develop Fathers' Support website
- Develop training and consultancy role and strategies for rolling out the model in other localities
- Relationship with other local projects that work with fathers – work proactively to improve support for fathers

- External agency internal review of strategies for enhancing efficacy of partnership working and referrals
- The relationship to Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board and other strategy groups
- Sharing of information with external local agencies (updates on staffing, activities, provision, plans etc.)
- Fathers Forum to encourage city-wide and more routine participation in debate, policy and planning on fathers and fatherhood, and to meet the broadening agenda of needs. The Father Figures Advisory Group would form one of many groups that could bring issues to the Forum
- The capacity to meet ever increasing demands.

A full report of recommendations, including further details about the actions listed above are provided in **Section 11** of the main body of the Evaluation Report.

1 INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the findings of an evaluation of The Father Figures Project, Sheffield. The evaluation took place during the period December 2003 to June 2004. It centred on developments in the period April 2003-2004 though data from the start of the project (April 2000) are included.

The evaluation aimed:

- to acquire a holistic picture of The Father Figures Project
- to document the particular model developed
- to assess progress and developments and make recommendations for developing and sustaining The Father Figures Project in the future.

This was achieved through the collection and analysis of evidence on:

- the history of the project and the nature of the model devised
- the methodology and practices adopted by the project
- the impact of the project on fathers and families, and other agencies
- developments, progress, strengths and weaknesses.

The evaluation drew on several data sources of which the most important are observations of group work, interviews with current and ex-clients, Father Figures staff and representatives from key external agencies and members of the Father Figures Advisory Group.

This report is structured as follows:

- Section two summarises key literature, the national policy context and policy documents relevant to support for fathers
- Section three describes the research and evaluation method
- Section four provides a chronology of The Father Figures Project and depicts key developments
- Sections five to ten provide the evidence from the findings that inform the recommendations
- Section eleven lays out the conclusions and recommendations
- Appendix 1: Interview Guide for current and ex-clients
- Appendix 2: Interview Guide for Father Figures workers
- Appendix 3: Interview Guide for other providers and external agencies
- Appendix 4: Creative writing by clients
- Appendix 5: Interim Findings Meeting.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

In general, the UK has a liberal and individualist tradition in relation to social policies. Childbearing and childcare have traditionally been regarded as a matter of individual choice and responsibility necessitating minimal state support, but for the most part assuming a male breadwinner model. While this does not provide an ideal starting point for increasing the involvement of fathers in caring for their children, there have nonetheless been important initiatives which have encouraged fathers to take on a more significant role in caring for their children. The 'Dads and Lads' campaign was set up as part of the 1998 National Year of Reading and the *Fathers Direct* service was established to promote closer relationships between fathers and their children. With similar objectives, Nacro's *Father Figures* Project was originally set up with the aim of targeting the fathers of children at risk of offending, but was later broadened to include the wider constituency of any fathers who might benefit from a programme aimed at developing their parental skills. Other allied projects across the country include *Fathers Plus*, *Boys to Men*, *DVD*, and *Newpin*. Initiatives such as these are based on research which indicates that parental involvement in children's care and education contributes significantly to educational success and social inclusion. Recently, more attention has been directed towards father involvement and the evidence shows that fathers contribute in valuable ways to their children's development when they are actively involved in their children's lives.

In the discussion below, the development in policies from the breadwinner father to the more recent model of the caregiver father is outlined by drawing on the extant literature in this field. The first section shows that while New Labour has inherited and continued some of the previous government's traditional gendered discourses on parental roles, there are, nevertheless, encouraging signs of increasing policy support for more diverse forms of family life, on the basis that these can also provide the conditions for successful raising of children. It is within this context that a new emphasis has been placed on the positive contributions that *fathers* can make by assuming a caring rather than merely a breadwinning role. This is followed by a consideration of the modern model of fathering and of the available research that indicates its advantages. It is concluded that there is still much to achieve in this area as, despite the emerging role model of the modern involved fathers, many young men, particularly the young and disadvantaged, often fail to assume their full parental responsibilities. In this sense, the literature suggests that there may be increasing polarisation between involved and non-involved fathers in the future. Finally, some important initiatives that support fathers in their

parental roles, including the contribution currently being made by *Father Figures*, are identified and considered.

2.2 From Conservative Policy to 'Third Way' Family Policy

In the 1980s and early 1990s political concern and policies were centred on the demise of the two-parent family, which was seen as the necessary bedrock of children's upbringing. The Children Act (1989) was clearly premised on continued parental responsibility, especially financial responsibility, across households. The main issue was that a growing number of men were living apart from their biological children, and that a high proportion of lone mothers were dependent on state benefits rather than on the paid wages or maintenance paid by the father of the child. With the aim of combating the 'dependency culture' and reinforcing fathers' financial responsibilities, the Conservative Government introduced the controversial Child Support Act (1991) which made non-residential fathers legally bound to provide financially for their biological children¹ (Finch 2004). It has been asserted that the CSA was conceptualised more in terms of a tool for locating the financial responsibility for children into the private sphere rather than as a means of alleviating child poverty (Wasoff and Dey 2000: 136). The evidence suggests that, in reality, few women and children have found themselves financially better off as a result of it (Craig *et al* 1996).

In contrast with previous governments that supported the 'family', while nevertheless regarding it as a private sphere, New Labour established a Ministerial Group on the family soon after coming to office in 1997. The intention was to promote 'joined up' thinking with regard to family policies (Wasoff and Dey 2000: 131) whilst emphasising the role of the institution of marriage in strengthening family life. In the foreword to an influential report by the Social Exclusion Unit, Blair (1999: 4) highlighted the importance of the Child Support Agency, stating that would take on a more important role in the future. In 1998, Jack Straw, then Home Secretary stated:

In our manifesto we committed ourselves to strengthening family life. We promised to 'uphold family life as the most secure means of bringing up children. Families are the core of our society. They should teach right from wrong. They should be the first defence against anti-social behaviour.' (Straw 1998 cited in Adams 2002: 113)

Despite the obvious continuation with the traditional family discourse of Conservative administrations, the picture is more complex and contradictory than the above might suggest. Since the election of the first New Labour Government in 1997 a range of initiatives, aimed at combating social exclusion, have been introduced. With regard to child

¹ At the same time, the 1991 Criminal Justice Act came into effect, which also made it the parent's responsibility for any financial penalty imposed on their children under the age of 16, unless it was unreasonable.

welfare and childcare there has been a paradigmatic change towards focusing on the diverse factors underpinning child development. This is strongly reflected in a *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*, published in 2000 by the Department of Health. This document underscores the need for an 'ecological' (Houston 2002) interpretation of child welfare, locating this within the context of the family and wider social networks (Jack 1998). More recently, this approach was clearly embedded in the *Green Paper Every Child Matters* (Home Office 2003: 17) in which the factors associated with poor outcomes for children are identified. These include low income and parental unemployment, homelessness, poor parenting, poor schooling, substance misuse and community factors, such as living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. This acknowledgement in government circles of the multiplicity of inter-dependent factors that can affect children's welfare has led, among other things, to a new emphasis being placed on parenting skills. The Children's Bill (2004) aims to support parents undergoing change in a number of ways. These include involving wider kin networks, improving advice and information services (including financial advice), seeking a better balance between the demands of home and work and, whilst seeing marriage as the preferred setting for bringing up children, nonetheless supporting diverse parenting situations.

Facilitating the involvement of fathers is an agenda now reflected in a number of Government initiatives. In November 1998 the UK Home Secretary issued a consultation paper *Supporting Families: A Consultation Document* (Home Office 1998: 58-49). The paper stresses the importance of families and, among other things, proposes education programmes for marriage, parenthood and also post-divorce parenting. A greater tolerance of diverse varieties of family forms is also apparent. Featherstone and Trinder (2001: 534) argue that, while it states a clear preference for the traditional family, it also contains a pragmatic recognition of the diversity of family forms whilst reflecting an emerging agenda of engaging fathers in a range of new ways. Whereas Conservative administrations had related to fathers primarily as financial resources for their children, *Supporting Families* appears to extend father's responsibilities beyond traditional notions, particularly in relation to their role in bringing up boys:

Increasingly, boys and young men seem to have difficulty maturing into responsible citizens and fathers. Declining educational performance, loss of traditional 'male' jobs, the growth of a 'laddish' anti-social culture, greater use of drugs, irresponsible teenage fatherhood, and the rising suicide rate may all show rising insecurity and uncertainty among young men. This has worrying implications for the stability of family life and wider society (...) Fathers have a crucial role to play in their children's upbringing and their involvement can be particularly important to their sons. (...) The Ministerial Group on the Family will be looking at ways of

encouraging the development of more widespread support for fathers.

In 1999, the Home Office made a range of grants available to 30 agencies in the voluntary sector, of which half went to projects concerned with fathers and/or young men. *Fathers Direct*, under the directorship of Adrienne Burgess was set up to provide advice and support for fathers. Burgess had argued in favour of 'reclaiming fatherhood', asserting that fathers tended to be negatively linked with the dangers of sexual abuse (Burgess 1997). Burgess also contested the over-emphasis on the father as provider which gave fathers little encouragement to become more actively engaged in caring for their children. One of the first activities of *Fathers Direct* was to issue an information pack for use with and by young fathers, which was aimed at increasing their involvement with caring for a new baby. *Father Figures*, founded by Nacro, is a further innovative scheme. The rationale underpinning its inception was that although some research findings had clearly linked a lack of parenting skills to the behaviour of young people in trouble, there had been little attempt to address this by working specifically with fathers.

In Meeting the *Child Care Challenge* (1998, see Featherstone 2003) the ungendered term 'parent' is used and the document addresses the needs of both mothers and fathers in relation to achieving a balance between family life and work. The fact that most British fathers work longer hours than in the rest of Europe is referred to directly. Since then, Statutory Paid Paternity Leave has been introduced (2003) and the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (2003: 20) has appeared, in which it is explicitly stated, 'We should recognise the vital role played by fathers as well as mothers.' This emphasis on the parenting and caring responsibilities of both mothers and fathers also resulted in the Adoption and Children Act of 2002 which made it easier for the biological but unmarried father to obtain parental responsibility. An unmarried father who is the natural father of the child can also acquire parental responsibility if they are named as the father on the child's birth certificate.

2.3 A Paradigmatic Change: From Breadwinner to Caregiver

The Government's agenda of supporting parents, including fathers, needs to be located within a wider paradigmatic change within contemporary society towards what may be termed more emotionally 'involved' fathering (Dermott 2003). A key aspect of this is a transforming understanding of the factors that constitute effective fathering. Prior to the late 1970s, most research relating to child-parent relationships focused on mothers as the dominant influence on child development whilst fathers were thought to play a less important role (Zaslow *et al* 1991). Recently, researchers have started to consider the role of the father in meeting the caring needs of his child, a development that is linked with societal changes, especially as a

result of women's increased participation in the workforce (LaRossa *et al* 1991). This has resulted in a blurring of traditional gendered childrearing roles and a related tendency to increasingly construct fatherhood in terms of 'achieved' as opposed to 'ascribed' (see Jensen 2001).

Ascribed fatherhood refers to a relationship based on a biological tie between father and child, a perspective from which fathers tend to be perceived as emotionally distanced breadwinners whilst mothers are regarded as nurturing carers. Throughout western contemporary societies this traditional model is being replaced by one which increasingly replacing the 'father of duty' with the 'loving father' (Bertaux and Delcroix 1992). Although fathering has traditionally received less attention in research compared with mothering (see Cabrera *et al* 2000) there is strong evidence to suggest that increased father involvement is significantly related to positive child outcomes (Amato 1994, Barnett *et al* 1992, Fagan and Iglesias 1999, Flouri & Buchanan 2002 and 2003, Hwang & Lamb 1997, Yongman *et al* 1995). Studies of the effects of father involvement suggest that involved, nurturing fathers are positively associated with the social competence, locus of control, intellectual and empathetic abilities of their children (Amato 1994, Gottfried *et al* 1998). Paternal deprivation has been associated with feelings of personal insecurity and poor self-concept (Billier 1993) as well as increased tendency towards anti-social behaviour (Pffifner *et al* 2001). In a paper published jointly by Fathers' Direct (Vol. 1(1)), the National Family and Parenting Institute, NEWPIN Fathers Support Centre, and Working with Men, the contributions that men make to their families are presented in way which is described as '...unashamedly positive.' The paper outlines fathers' roles both as caregiver and provider, whilst outlining the support they provide at various stages of a child's development, from involvement around the time of birth to adolescence and beyond. One of the main conclusions is that for both resident and non-resident fathers 'The more contact with the father the better adjusted their children to be' (Lewis *et al*).

Lamb's (1987) historical analysis identifies four periods of influence that have contributed to the modern view of the father's role in child development. According to Lamb, during colonial times the father's role was primarily that of disciplinarian. Minz (1998) also suggests that during colonial times fathers were responsible for teaching their children, in particular their sons, the skills and competencies required for earning a livelihood. The colonial period was eventually superseded by industrialisation which place greater demands on men for production. This, according to Lamb (1987), removed men's work away from the domestic sphere, thereby sharpening the definition of the father as the breadwinner and the mother as the nurturer. The net effect was to create a culture of 'daddyhood' that defined father as playmate and pal, and defined his role as caregiver as insignificant. The context of the Second World War created Lamb's (1987) third period. Perhaps stemming from the notion of father as

playmate, father's became more influential than mothers in the sex role socialisation. Finally, in contemporary times, which mark the fourth period of Lamb's historical overview, the role expectation of fathers has changed to one of nurturer. According to Lamb's (1987) analysis the four roles of disciplinarian, breadwinner, sex role socialiser and finally nurturer, are historically cumulative. Most significantly, the latest model of nurturer has been accompanied with and probably engendered by a number of societal trends: women's increased participation in the labour market, the absence of many men from their biological families, the increased involvement of other fathers in children's lives and spiralling divorce rates (Cabrera *et al* 2000, Lewis *et al* 2002).

It would seem that contemporary society is in the process of rediscovering what fathers are all about. A recent MORI survey, analysed by the National Family and Parenting Institute (1999) shows that younger people, both parents and non-parents, view love, care and time provided by both mothers and fathers as the key elements to raising happy children. *Fathers 4 Justice*, a radical civil rights movement, has recently gained high profile publicity (at the time of writing in 2004), with its commitment to a campaign of civil disobedience in the interests of strengthening non-resident fathers' rights of access to their children. It will shortly publish its *Blueprint for Family Law in the 21st Century* (F4J 2004 forthcoming), which it describes as '... a radical and visionary document that proposes a top to tail revolution in family law...' That some fathers want to assume greater childcare responsibilities is also evidenced by research (Palkovitz *et al* 2001) which suggests that fathers perceive positive changes in their life courses and personalities through assuming a new type of responsibility for childcare. Many men now view fatherhood as the single greatest shaper of their lives. For some this was a type of sudden awakening whereas for others fatherhood acted as a 'gentle evoker' of positive but latent personality traits.

2.4 The Challenges and the Ways Forward

While some of the evidence is encouraging, it is, nevertheless, equally a reality that many fathers become disengaged from their parenting roles for multiple and complex reasons and that there is a serious lack of support for young men preparing for parenthood (Quinton *et al* 2002). The available research suggests that fathers who do not feel confident about their child care abilities are less likely to be highly involved in childcare (Lamb, Pleck and Levine 1986). As a result, many fathers who are motivated to take on this role remain uninvolved because they do not believe they possessed the necessary skills (Lamb *et al* 1986). Equally, the concept of masculinity and how this relates to showing affection towards young children and in engaging in what could be seen as traditional feminine activities may be problematic for some men, especially young men who are in the process of developing their own male identities (Lamb

1997). This is further exacerbated by the persistence of deeply entrenched gender divisions in many families (Warin *et al* 1999). It seems that it is young fathers, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are most at risk of becoming disengaged from their parenting responsibilities (Quinton *et al* 2002, Dennison 2004). Overall, young fatherhood is associated with a number of social disadvantages, such as low levels of parental education, large family size, not being raised by two parents and difficult financial circumstances. There are also links with low educational attainment, psychosocial difficulties, low self-esteem and anti-social behaviour (Piffner *et al* 2001).

It is against this background that *The Father Figures* Project was established by Nacro in 2000, initially as a two year action research project. The primary aim was to raise fathers' awareness of the significance of the role they play in their child's life, which in turn affects the child's behaviour. It was anticipated that an improvement in the father's parenting skills would have a positive impact on children, thereby leading to a reduction in offending behaviour. More recently, the Project has widened its target client group to include all fathers and children who are at risk of social exclusion. Its wide-ranging approach of therapeutic group work, creative writing, mentoring, drama therapy and group work reflects the view, found also in the ESRC report, that fatherhood should be regarded as a process that should be supported rather than as a single event. In addition, becoming a father is seen as a golden opportunity moment for intervention with men as they are receptive to information and professional support (Fathers' Direct, 2003). Since the introduction of the Statutory Paid Paternity Leave in 2003, *Fathers' Direct* (2003) have addressed how health professionals can exploit this opportunity in the interests of infants, mothers, fathers, and families generally. The report identifies four key areas in which fathers require information and support: postnatal depression, breastfeeding, infant care and relationship with the mother. It advocates including the father at all stages of the pregnancy by, for instance, running evening antenatal classes and, in some cases, men-only antenatal sessions.

Though Father Figures has emerged within a wider national fathers' work movement and alongside allied projects, and its provision reflects guidelines on best practice (Burgess and Bartlett, 2004), the evidence also depicts a particular model (as above) for turning theory into practice on transforming work with fathers and bettering children's lives. *Fathers Plus*, *Fathers Direct*, *Newpin*, *DVD*, *Boys to Men*, *Working with Men*, employ a variety of approaches: some target only fathers and use only male workers, some target only fathers but use female and male workers, some work with men and women in joint group work focusing on the parenting relationship between mother and father and utilising female and male facilitators, and some prioritise one to one support, drop-in support, or group work. In addition, there are those that focus on campaigning and

operate an all male model, eg *Men United*, *Fathers 4 Justice*. *Father Figures* has emerged as a progressive model that provides multidisciplinary and diverse forms of provision (described in detail in section 6), but the team are united with allies across the nation in continuing to debate how best to meet the needs of fathers and their families and reflect on specific issues such as the gender mix of workers and clients. The legacy of fathers' marginalisation from mainstream debate and policy on parenting and raising children, until recently, has parallels with the women's movement and hence meeting the call for recognition of equality and difference is a task that is complex and far ranging and will only be met by strategies and practices that recognise diversity and the multitude of needs and with responsibility accepted by all providing agencies. It is in this context that *Father Figures* continues to develop but its growth will be influenced by the potential of the local context and key stakeholders therein to grow with it through modifying policy, practice, priorities and funding to facilitate enhanced support for fathers.

2.5 Conclusion

While the evidence points to a trend towards greater father involvement in the raising of children, there is clearly a great deal yet to be achieved. There may have been an evolution of father ideals from the colonial father to the modern involved father but, according to a report in *The Guardian*, the reality is that many young fathers have no regular contact with the child's mother within a year of its birth (Garvey 2004). Societal changes such as women's increased labour force participation, the absence of many men from their families, continual rises in the divorce rate have also fuelled concern about the role of fathers (Lewis *et al* 2002, Maclean 2004). This is accompanied by a growing recognition that the 21st century will be characterised by a widening gulf between involved and uninvolved fathers (Cabrera *et al* 2000). It is within this context that organisations such as *Father Figures* have started to assume an important role in enabling men, particularly the young and disadvantaged, to assume a full role in the care of their children. This has been facilitated by legislation which is showing the first encouraging signs of becoming more supportive of the caring responsibilities which it hopes fathers will increasingly assume. In this sense, new policy initiatives directed at fathers can be interpreted as a component of the over-arching goal of social inclusion. This is clearly appropriate in the light of an increasing body of evidence that showing that promoting fathers' greater involvement in childcare can enhance developmental outcomes for children.

3 METHODOLOGY

The evaluation included the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data.

3.1 Type of evaluation

The research strategy was designed as a partnership between the Evaluator and the project under evaluation, with the intention of being reflexive and constructive and to offer a critical external viewpoint.

It is notable that the project welcomed all forms of scrutiny, gave the evaluator open access to all records, and were honest in disclosures that drew attention to project weaknesses as well strengths.

The evaluation had 3 components:

- **Impact evaluation:** this documents the nature of project, its history/chronology, management and systems, outcomes, new developments, strengths, weaknesses, needs and aspirations. Overall it evaluates whether the aims and objectives have been met and how this has been achieved.
- **Process evaluation:** this is an ongoing element that assesses delivery, process and operation.
- **Action research:** this feeds findings back to the project as they emerge, and the project responds immediately where appropriate.

3.2 Evaluation Aims

The evaluation aimed:

- to acquire a holistic picture of The Father Figures Project
- to document the particular model developed
- to assess progress and developments and make recommendations for developing and sustaining The Father Figures Project in the future.

This was achieved through the collection and analysis of evidence on:

- the history of the project and the nature of the model devised
- the methodology and practices adopted by the project
- the impact of the project on fathers and families, and other agencies,
- developments, progress, strengths and weaknesses

3.3 Methods

Qualitative evidence, in the form of primary data (first hand accounts) were collected via the following:

- observation of, and participation in, group work sessions with clients
- individual face to face interviews with clients (current), the Project Team and representatives from external agencies
- e-mail questions to gather views of partners/other agencies team members
- small group interviews (project team)
- telephone interviews (ex-clients and those currently engaged in one-to-one work but not group work)
- clients' creative writing on perceptions and impact of Father Figures
- observation of Father Figures events
- observation and participation in Father Figures review day
- numerous meetings with the Project Co-Ordinator and Administrator

Other qualitative evidence was collected from analysis of

- project documentation (mission statements, project reports, targets etc.)
- project publications eg anthologies of writing by clients
- press coverage
- questionnaires/feedback on involvement with the project, evaluation of specific activities
- video-recordings of events and 'talking heads'
- video-recordings of previous interviews (Project Co-ordinator, clients' children)
- examples from initiatives (e.g. creative writing, exhibitions, photographs and other media)
- minutes/records of advisory group meetings
- chronology of Father Figures

Quantitative data were collected from

- previously conducted surveys and feedback sheets
- tracking and monitoring data (client referrals, referring agencies, type and duration of engagement).

Access pathway to research participants

A letter from The Father Figures project containing information on the evaluation, the evaluator, methodology, time-scale and request to participate in data collection, was sent to key stakeholders. These included external agencies, advisory group members (both regular attendees and those who attended infrequently or not all), and current and ex-clients. A differently worded letters were sent to clients and agencies though the overall content was similar.

The Father Figures Co-ordinator and Administrator proposed an initial cohort of individual workers/agencies that were recommended for interview on the basis of their past experience and/or involvement in the work of the project. The researcher then contacted potential interviewees by telephone. This reiterated the research strategy and detailed the

process, time requirements and answered any queries. A date and time for interview was agreed. In total, thirteen agencies were approached to participate in interviews and eleven interviews were conducted. Those interviewed were either specifically requested or volunteered as representatives of their respective agency by virtue of their having a significant strategic role, membership of the Advisory Group, or regular referral or networking relationship with the project (see appendix 3 for interview guide).

Access to clients occurred through a second letter to clients that sought permission for the evaluator to observe group work sessions and/or seek consent to their participation in an interview. Clients were asked to sign a consent form that was returned to the Father Figures key-worker.

Clients engaged in only one to one work (ie not group work) and ex-clients were contacted directly by telephone by the evaluator, following their receipt of the initial letter. A date and time for the telephone interview was agreed (see appendix 1 for interview guide).

The sample of potential interviewees was selected to include

- Young fathers
- Fathers over 19 years
- Fathers from minority ethnic backgrounds
- Self-referring fathers and those referred by agencies.

The standard fee used by Father Figures to cover travel expenses was provided to those who participated in group sessions observed by the evaluator.

Members of the Father Figures team were interviewed, first, in a group and secondly, individually (see appendix 2 for interview guide). In addition, the evaluator attended the Father Figures Review Day held in December 2003. Questions were asked during this session that were followed up in group and individual interviews.

Analysis

All data have been analysed on the basis of dominant themes. Findings have been summarised and points supported by extracts from the data. Removing names and any other identifying features has anonymised all data from interviews and observations.

3.4 Dissemination of findings

Findings have been disseminated through 3 channels:

- **On-going feedback to the project**

Information, queries and issues for further attention that emerged during the interviews or analysis of other documents were fed back to the project and attended to, if appropriate, with immediate effect.

- **Interim Findings Meeting**

This took place on 22 April 2004 (half way through the evaluation) at a local community facility. The purpose of this meeting was:

- ◆ To bring together key stakeholders (service providers and clients)
- ◆ To share progress on the evaluation and interim findings
- ◆ To maximise opportunities for research to inform practice (during the evaluation, as well as after completion)
- ◆ To provide an opportunity for stakeholders to comment on and discuss issues raised (and add to the existing data)
- ◆ To agree the subsequent trajectory of the evaluation.

The meeting was very productive and achieved its aims though attendance by external agencies was disappointingly low. Further details can be found in Appendix 5.

- **The Father Figures Project Evaluation Findings Conference**

This took place on 15 July 2004 at a city centre venue and included delegates who participated in the evaluation and other key stakeholders.

4 HISTORY OF THE FATHER FIGURES PROJECT

A chronology of developments and initiatives since the start of the project is detailed in the table below. In summary, it highlights an impressive range of new developments with local, regional and national agencies within a relatively short period of time and with limited resources. The project began in April 2000 with the appointment of its full time Co-ordinator. At this stage the project was called 'Future Fathers'. During the ensuing two years, the Co-ordinator set up the project, networked with potential partners and referring agencies, secured collaboration from workers at three local agencies (Centre for HIV and Sexual Health, C'mon Everybody, and 'Kickstart Drugs Project') who together provided various support and education initiatives for fathers and their families, and hosted various presentations and other events to share project developments and promote the work with fathers.

This occurred in the absence of routine administrative support and was a journey beset by challenges, particularly that of the local context that had no previous history of working with fathers and difficulties in recruiting clients to the work (see sections 9 & 10 for further details).

Despite this, client recruitment grew, and in July 2002 the Project Administrator (3 days/week) and Outreach and Development Worker (2 days/week) commenced work at the project. A freelance writer began work with the project (1 day/week) in September 2002 (to date), and the boys' and young men's worker from the Centre for HIV and Sexual Health jointly facilitated support group work from March 2001 to January 2003. The Outreach and Development Worker left the project in August 2003. In October 2003, two new Outreach and Development Workers (2 days each) were appointed, the Project Administrator became full time and the Project Co-ordinator became part time (3 day/week). Since this time the project has continued to consolidate existing initiatives and developed new ones. At the time of writing (June 2004) new funding sources are under exploration but the existence of the project after September 2004 remains uncertain.

Table to depict chronology of Father Figures developments and initiatives (March 2000 to March 2004) – see overleaf.

March 2000	Project Co-ordinator interviewed and recruited
April 2000	Project Co-ordinator starts work on project – named Future Fathers
April-July 2000	Co-ordinator networks with potential partners & referring agencies (60 people in 2 months; attends parenting & father work training; researches possible project structure & content, gathers resources, potential models for delivery, seeks close collaborators, advocates & co-workers for group and one-to-one delivery. Funding bid for artist in residence to Yorkshire Arts rejected.
16th July 2000	Local consultation event for agencies and workers. 30 people from 22 different agencies attend; (consult on project content, easiest referral routes, potential difficulties/barriers to achieving project aims, local needs; share current thinking & national context for the work - to this end, representatives from the Parenting Education Forum and Fathers Direct give presentations. Project name is changed to Father Figures through local consultation.
July-Sep 2000	Finalising project content & description, project pack and methods of delivery. Agree geographic & thematic placing of the groups and decide personnel for delivery. Initial referral form and process finalised .It is decided that three groups will launch in October: one in a Surestart area, daytime (Foxhill and Parsons Cross) one in Burngreave, in the evening (due to ethnic mix of local residents) and a city centre group focusing on working with fathers with substance misuse pasts (daytime)
Oct 2000	Groups launched, some referrals made, though numbers are low. Team (of four active facilitators) forms and meets on a weekly basis.
Oct-Dec 2000	3 groups run, though very low number of referrals means that sustaining these is very difficult. As a result the team decide to reduce down to two groups, the Foxhill group is closed and fathers who have attended are invited to join the city centre group which changes its thematic focus to a generic fathers group with mixed needs and experiences. Cinema trip and pizza, Xmas social. The delivery team reduces down to two facilitators.
Oct. 2000	Theatre trip for fathers and their families: Theatre in Education show about parenting.
Jan-end of Feb 2001	Two groups run, referrals increase & 6/8 fathers attend regularly. Project team decide to merge 2 groups into 1, thus closing city centre daytime group & focus on one working with 6/7 regular attendees at the evening group in Burngreave.
March – July 01	One group continues with regular attendance of 6 fathers, facilitated by Project co-ordinator and worker from Centre for HIV & Sexual Health. Guest speakers run one off sessions. Referrals continue to increase..
April 2001	Drumming and drama day for fathers and children
April 2001	Creative writing project results in Dads R Us (poetry book) & small public reading of a collection of writings by the group
Nov 2001	Theatre trip for fathers & their families- TIE show about parenting.
May 2001	Abseiling trip for fathers and their families
July 2001	Produce video on children's views of their fathers attending the group work.
16 th July 2001	Dissemination and sharing day. 60 people attend and fathers read some of there writing as well as forming a panel for an active Q & A with attendees.
End of July 2001	Group work period of pilot ends. Group go out for a meal and a final session for reflection.
July-Sep 2001	Break, gather thoughts and start future planning.
September-Dec 2001	Forming of future plans gathering info about fundraising opportunities. Referrals increase, some one to one work. One funding application completed and submitted to the Family Support Grant. No group work
Jan –Feb 2002	Funding application to TSB Lloyds completed and submitted. Involvement in Fathers Direct national fathers' conference planning. As a result, invitation to create a mixed media presentation with local fathers for the conference, which forms the backbone for the Father Figures road show. Group work for this particular purpose takes place.
March 02	Funding for three more years operation confirmed, planning for delivery of these three years starts. Process of recruiting new staff begins. Invitation to be one of 5 site national Young Fathers Project (Home office funded) confirmed
April 2002	Funding received from Lloyds/TSB, Home Office Family Support Grant and Trust for the Study for Adolescence (TSA)
May 2002	Recruitment of Project Administrator and Outreach & Development Worker
May 2002	Fathers' Conference, incorporating live performance by dads, at St Mary's
July 2002	Project administrator (3 days) and outreach & development worker (2 days) commence work on project

July 2002	Open Day for clients and agencies at St Mary's
August 2002	Proposed move to Family Service Unit (FSU) breaks down; alternative office and group accommodation sought
September 2002	Groups commence at Lansdowne Chapel: Tuesday daytime support group facilitated by coordinator, Tues evening A-Z to Fatherhood (young fathers) group facilitated by coordinator & young men's worker, Thursday creative evening group facilitated by coordinator and freelance artist/writer
Sept. 2002	Investigations start re possible tenancy at Denby Street School
Oct 2002	A-Z to Fatherhood group discontinued due to low numbers
Oct 2002	Pilot Dads Drop-in sessions at Denby Street School
Oct 2002	Abseiling group social
Oct 2002	First meeting of project Advisory/Steering Group (1)
Nov. 2002	Pilot Dads Drop-in sessions discontinued due to low numbers
Dec. 2002	Whole day Christmas group social - fathers cook/prepare food alongside their child/ren for the evening's party; after which creative group members read their work
Dec. 2002	Denby Street School tenancy investigations dropped; alternative office accommodation sought
Jan 2003	Death of young men's worker
January 2003	Negotiations concluded with Sheffield First for Safety re funding for evaluation of project, resulting in contracting of evaluator
January 2003	Project administrator increases hours to 4 days, to incorporate extra duties in connection with project evaluation
February 2003	After negotiations between evaluator and project administrator, work commences on setting up/refining of computerised and manual systems
Feb 2003	Advisory/Steering Group meeting (2)
Feb 2003	Negotiations re tenancy at FSU recommenced – with proposed move-in date of April 2003
Feb 2003	Half term group social (cinema)
March 2003	Advisory/Steering Group Meeting (3)
March 2003	Workers & clients invited to perform at conference in Essex (accompanied by evaluator)
March 2003	Ben and dads invited to perform at Men's Health Day (Healthy Cross project)
March 2003	Preparations for office move and for financial year end
April 2003	Office move to Family Service Unit
April 2003	Easter group social (bowling)
May 2003	Advisory/Steering Group meeting (4)
May 2003	Creative group work towards producing a film
May 2003	Evaluator temporarily unable to continue with work in progress due to sickness
June 2003	A-Z of Fatherhood group work (7 wks), for young dads, facilitated by FF & SureStart Midwife
June 2003	Participation by project workers and dads in 'Men Behaving Dadly' event in Norfolk Park
July 2003	Evaluator withdraws from project evaluation
July 2003	Dissemination event including launch of 'Talking Dads' at Showroom
July 2003	Dads only group social to celebrate the year's groupwork; followed by summer closure of groups
July 2003	TSA researcher interviews with young fathers
Aug 2003	Outreach & development worker leaves the project; work towards recruitment of replacement
August 2003	A month of break-ins at project premises, resulting in the loss of computer equipment and cash (not covered by insurance)
Aug 2003	Group social (train and walk in Derbyshire)
Aug 2003	Work on systems continued by project administrator
Sept. 2003	Commencement of Tuesday and Thursday groups, to incorporate young fathers as appropriate
September 2003	Commencement of Wednesday (10-week) 'Dancing Dads' project, in collaboration with Sheffield Arts Education
October 2003	Two new outreach & development workers start (2 days each), project co-ordinator decreases hours to 3 days, project administrator increases hours to 5 days
Oct 2003	New evaluation of project agreed
Oct 2003	Group social (photography treasure hunt in Castleton)
Oct 2003	Training event delivered by project (using 'Talking Dads') to CAMHS cross team meeting
Oct 2003	Outreach worker commences presence at Jessops Teenage Parents Antenatal class (on quarterly basis)
Nov. 2003	Advisory/Steering Group meeting (5)
Nov. 2003	New workers commence client initial assessment visits unaccompanied

Nov. 2003	Implement new procedures designed to maximise ratio between client referrals & engagements
Dec. 2003	On-Track fund publication of creative group's new poetry book & new third support group
Dec. 2003	Performance by dads in 'Fatherspeak' Conference at St Mary's Community venue
Dec. 2003	Performance by 'Dancing Dads' as part of event at Sheffield City Hall
Dec. 2003	Project review day – attended by evaluator
Dec. 2003	Group social – Christmas party at St Mary's
Jan 2004	Monday support group commences, facilitated by outreach worker & freelance worker
Jan 2004	Co-ordinator commences participation in Sheffield Families Matter group
Jan 2004	Project workers (3) facilitate at Sure Start regional training event using 'Talking Dads' as tool
Feb 2004	Publication of creative group's new poetry book, 'Fathers Figure'
Feb 2004	Advisory/Steering Group Meeting (no 6)
Feb 2004	Follow-up interviews with young fathers (Researcher from TSA)
Feb 2004	Investigations commence re relationship to Nacro
Feb 2004	Draft bid submitted on training pack to accompany 'Talking Dads'
February 2004	Project outreach worker in negotiation with local family of schools re: involvement in a programme of fathers/children literacy workshops
March 2004	Funding from Trust for Study of Adolescence for young fathers work finishes

5 OPERATION, NETWORKING & LIAISON WITH EXTERNAL AGENCIES

The following section outlines the project staff roles, funding arrangements, operation, management and support structure, and networking and liaison mechanisms.

5.1 Staffing, Management Structure and Funding

The project currently employs a Project Co-ordinator (3 day/week), two Outreach and Development Workers (2 days each), Project Administrator (full time) and a freelance writer in residence (1day/week).

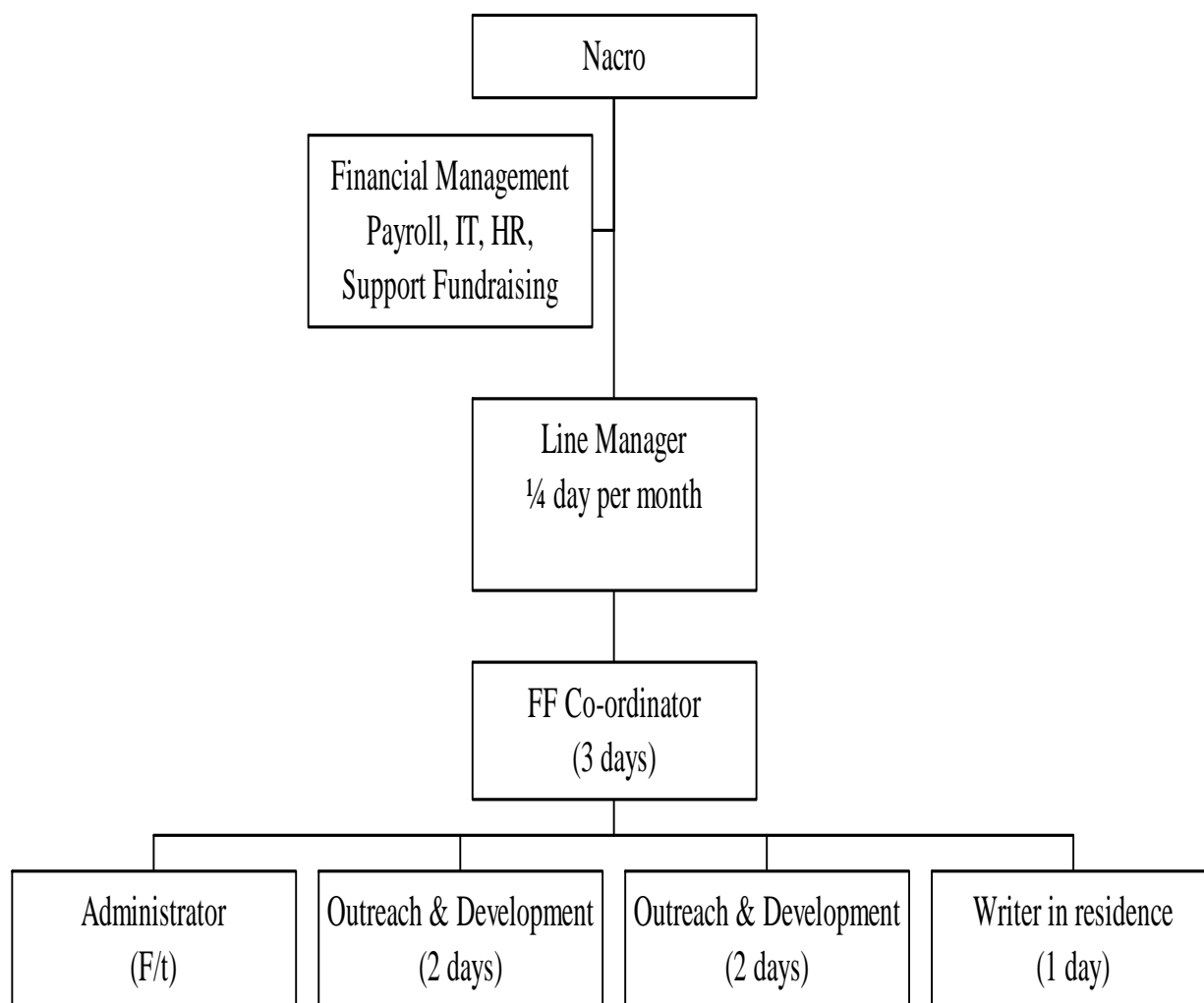
Nacro is the managing agency and the project is supported by an Advisory Group (see further detail below).

Father Figures is currently financed to work specifically with fathers. From April 2002 to March 2004 the DfES Family Policy Unit and the Lloyds TSB Foundation have funded Father Figures. During this period the Trust for the Study of Adolescence has funded work with young fathers (under 25 years) and Sheffield First for Safety has funded this evaluation of the project. In the current financial year, the project has received funds from The Children's Fund (via Darnall and Tinsley On Track). Nacro have approved a budget deficit to cover the contracts of the project Administrator and the two Outreach Workers until the end of September 2004, and Project Co-ordinator until March 2005. This is based on a proviso that by September 2004, either new funding will be identified or contracts will not be extended. The project is actively engaged in trying to identify new funding streams for funding until April 2007.

Nacro is the managing agency and takes 17% of all funds raised by Father Figures to cover Nacro's responsibility for human resource issues, IT support, line management of the project co-ordinator, process salary and expenditure payments and support fund raising for Father Figures. From the evaluator's perspective, this arrangement has not been fully functional and is perhaps unsurprising since Nacro is based in London which makes IT support and line management, in particular, rather difficult to achieve. Mechanisms for more effective support from Nacro warrant inquiry and review.

Participants (clients and external agencies) questioned Father Figures wider relationship to Nacro; given that Father Figures is family support oriented and Nacro is a crime reduction charity this can create anomalies in mission and (for some clients and stakeholders) tensions and stigma in the association with the crime reduction agenda. Both organisations would benefit from consultation and debate on the issues this raises for strategy and practice.

The diagram below indicates lines of management and team membership.



5.1.1 Staff roles

Staff roles are summarised as follows:

- **Project Administrator**

Developing and maintaining all administrative systems, including data collection, to support operation of the project office. The term 'administrator' does not sufficiently reflect the scope of this role. The administrator is also skilled at communicating with clients and performs a vital function as the first point of telephone contact with new clients and external agents. She also maintains liaison pathways between clients, staff and other agencies, gathers information necessary to the writing of reports, funding bids and other documentary evidence, contributes to visioning on project developments and has been vital to the evaluator accessing various sources of data for the evaluation.

- **Co-ordinator**

Overall management of all aspects of the project (conceptual, financial, report writing, fundraising and delivery), line management and supervision of all other project staff, networking and strategic development work, group facilitation, one to one caseload, liaison with and accountability to Nacro. The Co-ordinator has clinical (external) supervision and line management from Nacro.

- **Outreach and development workers**

Outreach and networking with key providers and strategic agencies; initial assessment of clients in home; one to one advice and/or support sessions; advocacy and court support; co-facilitating core group and *ad hoc* group work sessions (one of workers), attending training events and leading workshops, attending team meetings and visioning discussions on project aims and practice.

- **Writer in residence**

Preparing and co-leading core creative sessions, editing and writing on *ad hoc* creative projects, co-facilitating training events and leading workshops, leading workshops in schools, attending team meetings and visioning discussions on project aims and practice.

5.1.2 Team working and capacity

Individual interviews revealed that the Father Figures team has a clear and shared sense of project intentions, outcomes and direction. There are clearly defined individual and collective roles and responsibilities (all aware of own and each others), members work well individually and as team, they feel supported by and supportive of each other and all are confident that requests for personal support would be forthcoming and responses appropriate.

All staff are working to full or beyond capacity. Referrals have increased three fold in the last 12 months and one to one work has increased dramatically. More time is needed to sustain current levels of development, meet requests for outreach and development and maintaining liaison with other agencies, and exploring alternative roles for Father Figures (consultancy, training etc.).

5.1.3 Staff development and project review and development

The current unit of resource permits some time for staff and project development and dedicated review days facilitate time for reflection. But, staff would like more time for fuller reflection and debate on issues topical to fathers, families and children. Staff specifically request training and updates on:

- Legislation

- Policy and practice developments e.g. awareness and learning from related initiatives in other locations
- Continued Professional Development e.g. advanced counselling courses.

As well as regular team meetings, it is recommended that enhanced levels of funding be identified for staff development, project review and development; four dedicated project review days per annum are suggested.

5.1.4 Accommodation

Globeworks Business Centre housed the project from its inception in April 2000 to April 2002. This was a second floor, open plan office shared with other Nacro employees. Equality of access, privacy and designated space for work with clients was problematic. The project then relocated to a room (office) on the 4th floor of Sheffield Family Services Unit (FSU) and in June 2004 moved downstairs to a ground floor office. The practical and strategic support provided by FSU is valued by the project. Prior to the move the following issues were recorded as important to acknowledge:

- project visibility to the outside world
- the office accessibility to people with disability (2 of workers)
- suitability for drop-in, routine administration, and one to one or group work with clients. Currently, group work occurs on separate premises (e.g. Lansdowne), and one-to-one work takes place at the client's home
- designated staff space for regular contact, co-ordination and team meetings between team members.

The project should monitor whether or not these issues have been addressed in its new location.

5.2 The Advisory Group

The Advisory Group was originally set up to include key agency representatives and middle/top management. It was envisaged that the group would serve as a forum for debate and information exchange, as a sounding board for new developments and for devising strategy and funding priorities.

There are 42 members from the following agencies on its mailing list:

Lloyds TSB Foundation; Sheffield Family Service Unit (2 representatives); Nacro; Home Office Family Policy Unit; Social Services Family Support; Community Services Unit; Teenage Pregnancy Unit (1); Local Authority Family Support Education, Trust for the Study of Adolescence, Child and Family Therapy West Team; Fathers Direct; Midwifery and Ante-Natal Service (2); Sure Start Programmes (reps. from Sharrow, Foxhill, Burngreave, Tinsley, Gleadless Valley, Shiregreen and Firth Park, Woodthorpe and Wybourn, Southey and Shirecliffe); Early Years and Childcare Service; Sheffield Children's Fund; Centre for HIV and Sexual Health; Youth Court Panel; Child Protection Unit; Community Nursing

Services; Denby Street Nursery School and Family Centre; St Mary's Community Centre; Wybourn Youth Trust.

Clients (fathers) are not members of the Advisory Group, though Father Figures originally intended that fathers should be represented. This has not taken place because of lack of debate on mechanisms for ensuring that a fathers' representative is meaningful and useful to the clients and Advisory Group remit, and is not tokenistic.

Father Figures staff and those members of the Advisory Group interviewed agree that the original remit has not been fully effective. From the evidence available (register of attendance, minutes of the meetings and interviews) the most significant reasons are:

- the membership group is too large. Though some organisations are represented by more than one person, debate and decision making would be difficult if less than half members attended
- the remit of the group is unclear and not documented in writing; the group has not reviewed its purpose since inception
- current members are unsure of the purpose and aims of the group
- non-members are not aware of the Advisory Group
- poor attendance: during the past 18 months, 7 meetings have taken place, only 12 out of 42 members have attended on a regular or partial basis (28.5% of total). Other representative attend only occasionally or not all. This renders democratic strategy and decision making very difficult
- because the makeup of the group varies with each meeting time is spent on introductions and news updates which leaves too little time for discussion of strategy and Father Figures work
- prior commitments prevent some members attending and more advanced notice of dates for meetings has been requested
- the Advisory Group has become a main source of information exchange and liaison. If attendance is poor, information is not disseminated effectively (although minutes are posted on) and mechanisms for liaison are not fully effective
- mechanisms and responsibilities for dove-tailing information from advisory group members to other colleagues within respective agencies has not been negotiated or agreed, hence the percolation of information is not guaranteed
- the rationale for the current membership list and its representativeness has not been systematically reviewed or revised, despite changes in staff in external agencies.

5.2.1 Recommendation for Advisory Group

- Review the membership, representativeness (by agency) and purpose of the group

- The review process should be informed by wider consultation with key strategy groups and organisations in the city
- An independent facilitator could facilitate the process of review
- At least one father should be a member of the Advisory Group and strategies for supporting effective representation should be clear and documented
- Father Figures should ensure the Advisory Group list is up-to-date (contact details etc.)
- Agree a mechanism for post-meeting sharing of information (e.g. minutes) alongside other vehicles for information exchange
- Each member agency should nominate a representative, with the agency (not an individual) responsible for ensuring representation at meetings or replacing the representative if staff change
- Consider an inter-agency Fathers Forum to encourage city-wide and more routine participation in debate, policy and planning on fathers and fatherhood, and to meet the broadening agenda of needs. The Father Figures Advisory Group would form one of many groups that could bring issues to the Forum
- Meeting times should be scheduled on a yearly basis with 12 months warning; reminder letters (with agenda) should be sent prior to each meeting
- Agencies to provide a brief written résumé of news and developments to be distributed in hard copy at or prior to the meeting.

5.3 Networks and liaison with external agencies

The project has referral arrangements and/or developed specific initiatives and partnerships with a number of agencies. These include the following:

- Sheffield Family Services Unit
- Youth Court Panel (Sheffield Magistrates Court)
- Youth Offending Teams
- Social Services Family Support
- Health Visitors
- PCTs
- GP Practices (Practice meetings: GPs, Health Visitors, Practice Nurses, counsellors etc)
- School Welfare & School Counselling Service
- Turning Point, Rockingham Drug Project, SHED
- Maternity Services (The Jessop Wing)
- SOVA
- Scoop Aid
- Phoenix House Drug Services
- Sure Start Plus / Sheffield Futures
- Sure Start Projects
- Home Start
- DVD

- Various Youth Groups
- Schools (primary and secondary e.g. King Edwards, City School, Firth Park College)
- CAFCAS
- Centre for HIV and Sexual Health
- Film with young fathers (some in prison) funded by Sheffield YOT

Further details on sources and number of referrals can be found in Section 7.

Relationships with some agencies are more effective than others and project staff cite particular areas for further development. This includes

- The Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board where there is not a historical legacy of support for fathers in policy making and provision
- Work in schools. Support in schools for pregnant schoolgirls is on-going via Learning Mentors. Closer liaison could establish the degree of support for young fathers and explore possibilities for work with teenagers on fatherhood. The Hospital and Home Education Service has contact with all pregnant students (under 16) and therefore potential access to male partners or young fathers. Opportunities to develop this access route should be explored.

5.3.1 Factors promoting and constraining success

Several factors are perceived as significant to the success and effectiveness of Father Figures liaison and partnership with external agencies. These are summarised in Section 10 but the following issues are specifically relevant here:

- **Information exchange**

Information sharing on new initiatives and project developments is acknowledged by the project as important and requiring development. While this could undoubtedly be more rigorous, it is important to acknowledge the resource implications of fulfilling this function.

- **Referral process**

The volume of referrals and continuing increase in casework are testament to the success of establishing good mechanisms for referral between services. Publicity materials (flyers, adverts for Father Figures events) have been successful in signalling the project to clients who have self-referred. However, there is potential to make this more efficient through consolidating networking with existing partners and developing that with new partners and those that are not closely allied with Father Figures. The views of representatives from external agencies are detailed below (see section 9).

- **Agencies most significant to fathers**

Evidence from current and ex-clients suggests that some agencies are more significant to support and effective parenting than others and hence, it is important that Father Figures continues (or develops) close working relations and client advocacy with these agencies. These include Social Services (Case Work Social Workers), Social Services Family Support, Youth Offending Team, Phoenix House and court/custody officials.

5.4 Summary and recommendations

It is concluded that the project has made considerable progress in the last 12 months, in process and operations. It is recommended that:

- To preserve the work specifically targeted at fathers (and this includes that with partners and children) the strategy of targeted funding for work with fathers should be continued at least in the medium term.
- Key stakeholders should consider possibilities for routine (3 year) core funding to Father Figures and/or funding of specific initiatives (detailed in recommendations).
- Joint funding should also be identified for a consultancy exercise to review inter-agency needs and plan a strategy for the next 3-5 years.
- Enhanced levels of funding be identified for staff development, project review and development and four dedicated project review days per annum are planned
- Review mechanisms for effective support from Nacro.

6. THE FATHER FIGURES PROJECT MODEL

Father Figures is now a very different project to its original form. It has undergone considerable development to yield a model that is holistic, progressive, therapeutic, creative, social, flexible and needs led. It has strong administrative support and is developing increasingly rigorous referral mechanisms. All workers (including the administrator) have proven skills in working with fathers and their families. As a project that started from scratch (as a pilot initiative) it has evolved enormously in 4 years and is at a point where the expertise and learning that form part of the model could be mirrored in other locations.

The following provides details of the Father Figures Project model that emerges from various data

6.1 Project Aims

Broad

1. To provide a city wide support service for fathers in Sheffield
2. To influence mainstream policy and practice through enhancing cultural understanding and perception of fathers and fatherhood, and approaches to meeting fathers' needs, within other agencies, services and projects.

Specific

1. To develop strategies to involve and engage fathers across the city
2. To support fathers who have difficulty in parenting or in crisis and develop their skills and resources, confidence, autonomy and communication skills (parenting skills develop from this)
3. To develop and sustain fathers' own (peer) support networks
4. To develop strategies for liaison and referral between Father Figures and other agencies/services.

6.2 Philosophy

The following points underpin the project's philosophy:

- Recognition that fathers play a pivotal role in children's upbringing; co-parenting as a principle not withstanding externally imposed restrictions:
'Parenting is implicit to our philosophy and methods we use and this is in addition to the 'A to the Z of Fatherhood' course¹)
- Emphasis on encouraging fathers to take responsibility for self
- Provide space for fathers to evolve and change:
'...help fathers to develop their skills and decide what they need and what they can do... and strategies for moving on'

¹ Written, piloted, implementation due when worker from Centre for HIV and Sexual Health died (as yet not replaced).

'We facilitate fathers in believing change is possible, as individuals and for the family... and develop their commitment to change and the consequences of change .. time, resources, inclination'

- Improving father's parenting skills and raising awareness of their role in their child's behaviour will contribute to lessening the likelihood of the young person becoming involved in anti social behaviour and crime
- Responses dependent on individual need
- Client-centred and led
- Multi-faceted and diverse interventions (support, advocacy, practical advice, sign-posting to other agencies, mechanisms for growth and change)
- Not time limited:
'It's difficult to predict how much support is needed, how long the journey might be'
- Grass roots approach
- Partnership with other agencies regarded as backbone to success
- Aims to prioritise young fathers/fathers to be in future strategy
- Parenting work by Father Figures aims to complement other (on-going) initiatives in other projects.

6.3 The target group are fathers who:

- are experiencing difficulties in their fathering role
- are socially isolated and in need of support
- have expressed a desire or need for help in dealing with their child/rens behaviour
- have a child who is at risk of social exclusion, anti social behaviour and crime
- are lone parents and feel they need support
- have expressed a need for support in dealing with court proceedings, access and custody issues.

6.3.1 Fathers not appropriate to the project are:

- perpetrators of domestic violence or sexually related offences
- diagnosed as having long term and enduring mental health issues e.g. multiple personality disorder, schizophrenia
- legally denied access to their children related to child protection issues
- substance users whose addiction is not under supervision.

Cases are discussed on an individual basis, with the referring agency and/or the father himself, to establish whether the project is appropriate for a potential client.

6.4 Key areas addressed by the project

- the participants' own experience of being fathered
- the participants' perception of their children
- building awareness of the importance of the participants' role in their child's life
- the participants' attitudes to money and employment

- fair and effective boundary setting
- building self-esteem, self-worth and confidence
- working with multiple skills to negotiate difficult circumstances
- maintaining appropriate levels of discipline
- anger management and conflict resolution
- examining assumptions about masculinity and the role of men in society and the family
- information awareness and exchange
- self-reflection on practical and economic needs (domestic, employment, benefits etc.).

6.5 Methodology

Father Figures is a unique model of provision. Particular aspects contribute to this uniqueness, with the methodology being the most notable. Its creative-arts-based approach gives it distinctiveness but this is only one (but complementary) aspect of the portfolio of methods. Essentially, there is no fixed method. The approaches adopted are responsive, diverse and constantly being reviewed, with new ideas introduced all the time. This is reflected in the following descriptors that were offered by interviewees to describe the methodology:

'Flexible', 'individual', 'needs-specific', 'needs-led', 'emergent', 'developing all the time'

This approach is highly appropriate to a client group whose needs are diverse and often complex. As Quinton et al (2002: 4) comment,

The transition to parenthood is clearly a process and not an event. It is also a complex process in which a wide variety of influences may be at work.

Therefore, it requires a diversity of responses, whether fathers are new to parenthood or well established in this role.

Self-disclosure from workers and including their own families in socials is very important as a principle and significant to its effectiveness. It appears to demystify the professional 'role', and enhances transparency and normality.

The **grass roots** approach is also significant. Father Figures starts from where fathers are at, integrates into the existing practices of other agencies and aims to influence policy making with a bottom up approach.

6.5.1 Specific methods with fathers

- Arts, media, creative work (writing, poetry, video, dance, role play, games, visualisations, use of metaphor, drama, puppeteering)
- One to one – in person and by telephone
- Group work (3 groups: Monday 12.30-2.30 'new' referrals support group, Tuesday 12.15 – 2.15 support group, Thursday 6-8 pm creative group work)
- Advocacy (and practical and emotional) support in court proceedings, (e.g. accompany fathers at meetings, custody issues, court/trials)

- Education and knowledge (from credible sources i.e. other fathers)
- Practical and bureaucratic support (legal work, housing, benefits etc)
- Legal advice and information
- Developing social interaction and informal peer support
- Socials (bowling, abseiling, eating, rural walks and picnics etc.)
- Outreach and development (aimed at agencies, services and other projects)
- Training and consultancy.

6.5.2 Methods with other agencies

- Networking, one to one meetings, follow up requests
- Advisory group
- Events, conferences
- Referrals (telephone, meetings, letters)
- Nacro newsletter
- Publicity (posters, leaflets)
- Input into existing partnerships and strategy groups etc. (e.g. Sheffield Parenting Strategy group, Sure Start Plus sub-group of Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board)

6.6 Publicity

Father Figures publicity includes a poster and leaflet (for all ages), leaflet targeting young fathers and a credit card (similar information and format to leaflet). These materials clearly depict the project aims, 'who it is for', 'what's on offer' and methods of contact. A majority of the points in the guidelines for father-friendly leaflets and posters (Burgess and Bartlett, 2004) have been adhered to, though the project has not included quotes from those already using the service. The materials are only available in English. The project has opted not to target any specific communities (aside from young fathers) in its publicity. This strategy is not supported by some of the interviewees from referring agencies (see section 9.7).

6.7 Co-ordination, systems and administration

A system has been developed for client data collection, retrieval and tracking. The next section (7) discusses this in more detail but here it is important to note that this is intended to ease the referral process, facilitate routine liaison with referring agencies, monitor levels of referral and client engagement and provide quantitative measures that can inform target achievement and setting and inform resource requirements.

6.8 Conclusion and recommendations

While it is recommended that Father Figures retains its specific model of practice because of its success in meeting a diversity of needs, its potential for effective expansion and sustained funding will be enhanced by the ability to demonstrate flexibility and adaptability in response to stakeholders requirements and changing policy priorities. In other words, Father Figures should continue to offer packages of support that other

agencies can opt into but should also be able to tailor provision in accordance with external requirements and respond with a portfolio of options. Among a number of options, this might include tailored projects for fathers/men from specific communities, agencies (e.g. YOTS) or institutions (e.g. schools), peer support initiatives, consultancy (e.g. on devising in-house projects) and training for other agency staff.

To ensure Father Figures is in a position to respond with satisfactory urgency, it is important that the project builds in time and resources to review its resources and abilities to respond flexibly. The projected plans should be disseminated to stakeholders. Financial projections should include the funding of time for review and planning and a contingency to fund unanticipated external projects/consultancy etc. This strategic and proactive approach will encourage external agency support and develop the current portfolio of provision. In addition, the project should work closely with other organisations providing support to fathers and campaign for change in all sectors that work with families and children.

It is recommended that:

- the project continues to reflect on and document its particular model of provision (with regular updates). This should include information on philosophy, methodology, strategy, targets, management, administration and tracking systems and tangible outputs (client engagement and outcomes, films, literature, theatre etc.)
- Information on project development and methods of working should be regularly disseminated to relevant agencies. This will
 - facilitate information sharing with stakeholders and partners
 - ensure the project is transparent and accountable and its successes measurable, and sustainable in the event of staff changes or other unforeseen events
 - enhance the feasibility of modelling the project in other localities and agencies.

7 DATA CAPTURE, REFERRALS, LIAISON AND BASELINE DATA

7.1 Data Capture

The data capture systems were set up after the project's initial pilot phase, i.e. in July 2002 when the project team expanded to include a project administrator and outreach worker. The past 12 months have seen further developments and its refinement is on going. It serves the following purposes:

- more effective collection, monitoring and retrieval of data on client based activities
- meets different funding body's requirements for capturing data (e.g. data on ethnicity, employment status)
- quantification of progress and growth of client base and level of provision
- referral system easier for external agencies (less time consuming).

7.2 Referral and assessment forms

So far, the following have been developed:

Telephone referral form - this revised version (since August 2002) facilitates quantitative tracking and analysis of new referrals and source of referrals. Once a father has been referred to Father Figures by telephone, this form is completed by the project administrator or other worker via a telephone conversation with the referring agency. It provides brief information on:

- referring agency's details
- client's details (name, address, age, ethnicity, age/sex of children, domestic situation, reason for referral)
- motivation for referral (from agency or client)

This telephone assessment is followed up by direct contact with the client and a fuller assessment is made (see below).

Initial Assessment Form – this is completed on first meeting with prospective client at the client's home. This provides the following information:

- age
- ethnicity
- employment status
- parental status (biological, step, role model) and living arrangements (with or apart from child/ren)

- age/sex/date of birth of children
- current situation regarding relationship with children
- father's reasons for involvement in Father Figures
- history relevant to entry to Father Figures (domestic violence, sex offender, access to children, mental health, substance misuse, other risk factors)
- referring agency's details and reasons for referral

This assessment form has been revised several times and remains subject to on-going refinement. This is necessary both to meet new demands from funders and ensure the project responds in terms of the nature of record keeping that proves to be most useful and ethical vis-à-vis working with clients and relationship to other agencies

7.2.1 Revisions

As part of the action research element of this evaluation, the need for some changes became evident. Revisions have already been made and include:

- Date of first assessment
- Signature of client and worker
- Consent to participation in evaluation of the project

Whether to request information, at the assessment stage, on the potential client's domestic situation (specific information on partner/wife/mother of child) is under debate.

7.3 Individual client profiles

Since October 2003, individual client profiles are held for each client. This will eventually detail the frequency, duration of involvement, exit strategy and outcome for all clients.

7.4 Client monitoring and outcomes

The system (see tables 5-8 below) is being developed to include the type and length of provision (e.g. one to one, group, advocacy, conversations, socials etc.); and current status of involvement. Eventually, this will be logged as 'active', 'pending', non-active'.

Case closure details currently log the date of exit but the intention is to include more information on the exit process and outcomes.

7.5 On-going evaluation and feedback

The project currently conducts self-completion surveys of group-work sessions and socials and has video recordings of children's views on their involvement in events. The project intends to disseminate findings from the analysis of this feedback to relevant agencies. Clients involved in one-to-one do not provide written feedback on their experience. For this reason, interviews were specifically conducted with a sample of these clients.

7.6 Baseline data

The following data were collected over the last two years. Data from the previous and current year have been included to facilitate comparison and demonstrate progress.

Table 1: Referrals received (1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003)

The table depicts the age and ethnicity of referrals as required by one of the project's three funders (the other two funders having no specific necessity to report on client age).

The first row of data shows the number of clients that were assessed after referral. The second row shows the numbers that were referred but did not reach the initial assessment phase. Reasons for this were not recorded at the time but have become apparent under the revised system (see discussion under table 2).

BME: Black and minority ethnic groups

WB: White British

O: Over 25 years

Y: Under 25 years

	BME (Y)	BME (O)	WB (Y)	WB (O)	TOTAL
Referrals – initially assessed/interviewed	4	1	9	23	37
Referrals – not initially assessed/interviewed			3	7	10
TOTAL					47

In summary, of the 37 that were initially assessed, 32 (86.5%) were White British and 5 (13.5%) were Black or from Minority Ethnic Groups. For clients under 25 years, 4 out of a total of 13 (31%) were Black and Minority Ethnicity fathers and 9 (69%) were White British fathers.

Table 2: Referrals received (1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004)

	BME (Y)	BME (O)	WB (Y)	WB (O)	TOTAL
Referrals – initially assessed	0	7	11	38	56
Referrals – pending initial assessment	1			2	3
Referrals – not initially assessed*	2	2	6	12	22
TOTAL					81

This table shows an increase in referrals of 58% from 47 in 2002-3 to 81 in 2003-4. The project target for 2003-4 of 40 new referrals has therefore been doubled. Of those reaching initial assessment, all clients in the British and Minority Ethnic Group category are over 25 years (12.5% of total) with 11 and 38 in the White British under 25 years and over 25 years respectively (87.5% of total). In comparison with 2002-3, this shows a 1% increase in the WB clients and 1% decrease in BME clients. In conclusion, the project is receiving referrals that are more representative of minority ethnic groups than the city's total BME community of 8.8%.

Since April 2003, the project has introduced a new procedure to ensure all referrals are followed up in a consistent manner and to document why referrals did not proceed. At least three attempts are made to contact a referred client to arrange an initial assessment. As a result, with regard to Table 2 a number of outcomes were recorded to explain the 22 referrals that did not reach the initial assessment stage. The most common reasons are that the father proved unable to be contacted or messages were left but the father did not respond; less frequently the father proved to be an inappropriate referral (i.e. with needs outside the remit of the project) or indicated that they did not wish to proceed at present, or were referred onwards to another agency.

Tables 3 and 4 show the sources of referral and permit comparisons between the period 2002-3 and 2003-4. During the period 2002-3 the project received referrals from 18 sources, whereas in the period 2003-4 the number of referral sources increased to 34. For the entire two-year period referrals were received via 44 different routes.

The number of self referrals has almost tripled from 5 in 2002-3 to 13 in 2003-4.

Table 3: Source of referrals (1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003)

SOURCE	PROGRESSED	NOT PROGRESSED	TOTAL
Attendance & Inclusion Service	1		1
Child & Family	1		1

Therapy Team			
DVD	2		2
Family Service Unit	1		
Family Support Standhouse	1		1
Family Support Social Services Halifax Site (formerly Eastbank)	4	4	8
HomeStart	2		2
Phoenix House	3	2	5
Progress to Work		1	1
St Ann's Shelter		1	1
Scoop Aid	3		3
Social Services Meade House	2	1	3
Social Services Redvers House	2		2
Solicitors	1		1
Sure Start Plus	3	1	4
Self	5		5
Source unclear	3		3
Youth Offending Team	3		3
TOTALS	37	10	47

This table shows that of the 37 that were progressed, 13.5% of total (5 fathers) self referred.

Table 4: Source of referrals (1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004)

SOURCE	PROGRESSED	NOT PROGRESSED	PENDING	TOTAL
Beven Court Hostel	1			
CAFCAS	1			
C'Mon Everybody		1		
Duke Medical Centre		1		
Family Service Unit	2	1	1	
Family Support Education		1		
Family Support SW Sheldon Rd	3	2	1	
Family Support NE Hinde House School	5		1	
Family Support Standhouse	3	1		
Family Support Social Services Halifax Site	2			
Firth Park Surgery	1			
The Foyer		1		
Solicitors		1		
Hanover Medical Centre	1	1		
Jessops – Outreach	1			
Jessops Social Work Team	2			
Myers Grove School		1		

No 42 Leaving Care		1		
North Sheffield Drugs & Alcohol	1			
Norfolk Park Health Centre	1			
Phoenix House	6			
Richmond Health Centre	1			
Scoop Aid	1			
Social Services Darnall		1		
Social Services Meade House	1			
Social Services Redvers House	1	3		
Stencil Tenancy Support	1			
Sure Start Firth Park	4			
Sure Start Foxhill (Community Midwife)	3			
Sure Start Sharrow		1		
Sure Start Plus	3	1		
Turning Point		1		
Self	11	2		
Source unclear		1		
TOTALS	56	22	3	

This table shows that of the 56 clients that have progressed to date (at cut-off date for data collection) 11 have self referred. This represents 19.6% of the total and an increase on the previous year (13.5%).

Types of engagement

Within each financial year, the project is now able to track not only the number of referrals and the referring agency but most significantly, what happens to those referrals once they are received into the project. The project administrator admits that the latter has proved particularly challenging, given the large number of referrals now received into the project and the disparate outcomes in terms of client engagement. Some clients have an initial assessment but do not take up services offered, some attend one group session only or have a one-to-one support session and some consistently attend group work, every social event, receive advocacy support and have regular one-to-one sessions. Between these extremes are a variety of other levels of client engagement. Given the current funders' requirements, the project has elected to include (in the record of client activity) all clients who, after an initial assessment, have received at least one further instance of support from the project (see Tables 5 and 6), within the period of a particular financial year. Hence, for each of the financial years in question the project has recorded the number of clients who were referred *within that period of time* and how many of those clients have received support *within that same period of time*. However, the duration of client support is not time-limited, therefore, during a given financial year, the caseload will include clients

who were referred during that and the previous financial year (see Table 7).

Although Tables 5, 6 and 7 indicate the number of clients who have benefited from at least one group work session, social activity, one-to-one and advocacy session, it does not indicate the number of times those clients have had that service, nor whether they had one of those services alone or have experienced all of them. Hence, this prevents the project from building a sound picture of the frequency and duration of individual client engagement with the project. At earlier stages in the project, when the number of client referrals was smaller, mental pictures of client progress sufficed. The project is now well past the stage of being able to rely on mental pictures and is currently addressing how best to collect data on the extent of client engagement and progress.

Table 5: Number of clients and type of support (1 April 2002 - 31 March 2003)
relating only to clients referred and initially assessed during same period

	BME (Y)	BME (O)	WB (Y)	WB(O)	TOTAL
Support Group	0	1	0	10	11
Creative Group	1	1	2	10	14
One-to-One	1	1	5	9	16
Socials	1	1	1	12	15
Advocacy	1	1		4	6
TOTALS	4	5	8	45	62

Table 6: Number of clients and type of support (1 April 2003 - 31 March 2004)
relating only to clients referred and initially assessed during same period

	BME (Y)	BME (O)	WB (Y)	WB (O)	TOTAL
Support Group	0	2	4	10	16
Creative Group	0	3	1	6	10
A-Z Group (under 25s)	0	N/A	5	N/A	5
One-to-One	0	3	6	20	29
Socials	0	2	2	10	14
Advocacy	0	0	1	3	4
TOTALS	0	10	19	49	78

Table 7: Number of clients receiving support (1 April 2003 - 31 March 2004)
relating to clients referred and initially assessed during both 2002-3 and 2003-4

	BME (Y)	BME (O)	WB (Y)	WB (O)	TOTAL
Support Group	1	2	4	18	25
Creative Group	0	4	2	14	20
A-Z	0	N/A	5	N/A	5
One-to-One	1	4	9	31	45
Socials	1	3	2	17	23
Advocacy	1	1	2	9	13
TOTALS	4	14	24	89	131

Tables 5-7 reflect the huge increase in the level of support being offered to clients over the last financial year. For example, 45 clients have received one or more one-to-one support sessions over the last year, which represents a threefold increase since 2002-3.

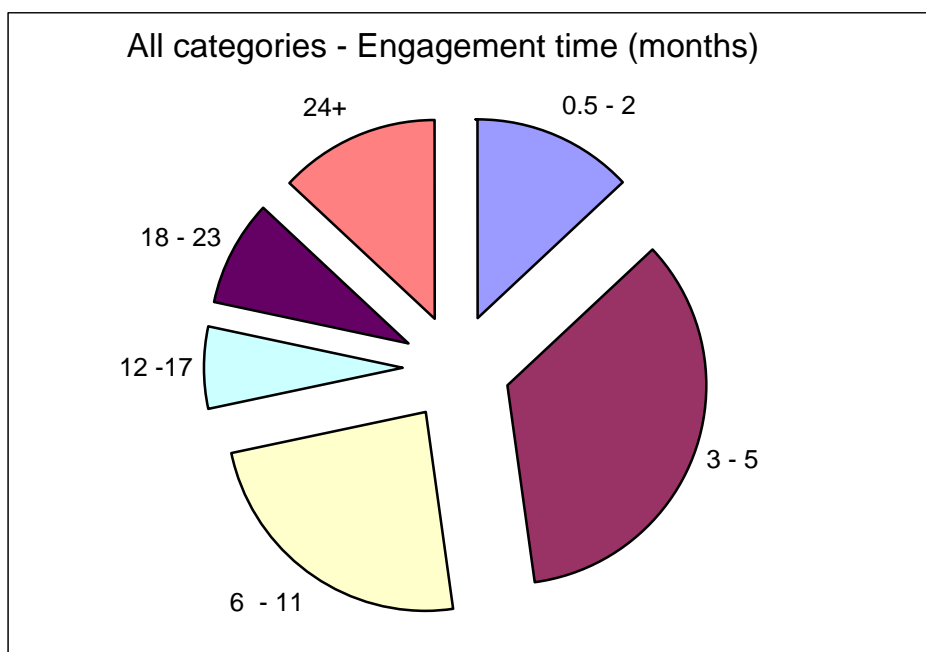
Length of client engagement

Table 8 denotes the duration of client engagement, based on clients who have been referred at any point over the last two financial years. At the current time, this does not present a comprehensive picture, as some client records have not been kept up-to-date, but it does give some sense of a “typical” length of engagement.

Table 8: Length of client engagement (1 April 2002 - 31 March 2004)

	BME (Y)	BME (O)	WB (Y)	WB (O)	TOTAL
2 yrs or more	1	1	1	3	6
18-23 months				4	4
12-17 months	1			2	3
6-11 months		1	3	7	11
3-5 months		2	5	9	16
0.5-2 months		1	1	4	6

The graph below shows duration of engagement for all categories of client. The most frequent category (mode) of client engagement falls within the 3-5 month bracket, with an average (median) engagement time of 6 months.



Recent changes to client engagement records include a column showing 'date last seen'. These data form part of discussions on mechanisms for better monitoring of client exit from the project and the development of a more routinised exit strategy.

7.7 Conclusions and recommendations

The above data are testament to the advances made by Father Figures in data capture and tracking over the past two years. The administrator is commended for making the process transparent to the evaluator but also for the critical and reflective approach that has documented strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. Overall, the data show that the project has met and exceeded all targets with fathers engaged in various forms of support and provision. Over the past two years, the project has received an increasing number of referrals from an increasing number of agencies as well as a growing number of self referrals.

In terms of the project's ability to attract and engage fathers from minority ethnic groups (BME), data show that referrals and levels of engagement of older fathers have increased over the last year. For younger BME fathers, this year's referrals are down from 4 to 3 and the project has not succeeded in engaging any new young BME fathers this year. However, other evidence (interviews and group work observation) illustrates the project's ongoing success in working intensively with young fathers from BME backgrounds referred in previous years.

Although the categories for denoting ethnicity reflect those specified by the project funders it would be useful to record ethnicity more specifically to allow distinctions between different minority ethnicities (e.g. Chinese, Yemeni, Somali, Pakistani, African Caribbean etc.). This would provide insights to inform targeting and monitoring of specific communities.

Regarding younger fathers in the White British (WB) category, the number initially assessed has remained fairly constant, but the level of support to fathers has increased threefold this year (from 8 in 2002-3 to 24 throughout the last financial year). As a result of feedback from young fathers last year, group work has been age-integrated to include both older and younger fathers. This may be one reason for the increased level of engagement of younger fathers.

The most 'common' referral is an older (i.e. over 25) White British father (WB) and this category of client is also the most frequent user of the services.

Regarding liaison and feedback to other agencies the project has improved the telephone referral system and collects enhanced levels of knowledge in that process. Plans for more routinised feedback to referring agencies are underway.

It is recommended that the project

- continue the development and refinement of data capture systems
- explore possibilities for recording ethnicity more specifically
- continue developments to register client exit date and outcome
- set time aside to ensure Father Figures staff are familiar with data collection requirements and systems and agree a process and timescale for the return of data to the central system
- devise a feedback sheet for those involved in one-to-one work
- agree the frequency for collecting written feedback from clients involved in group work, one-to-one work, socials and events e.g. every 3 months
- agree the content and wording of feedback sheets specific to the provision
- revise methods for collecting evidence from families/children
- ensure feedback is collated and analysed (both to inform practice and subsequent evaluation)
- agree a strategy for feeding referral and outcome information back to relevant agencies
- offer a short course for other agencies on the Father Figures data capture system (to include problems, frustrations and other learning and solicit feedback on the effectiveness and usefulness to other agency practices).

8 FATHERS' (clients & ex-clients) VIEWS ON FATHER FIGURES

Themes

The findings have been analysed and reported by theme, below. Where possible, the fathers' own words have been used to illustrate themes. All extracts from the evidence have been anonymised but those from young fathers are indicated in order to emphasise the impact of the project on this client group. It is important to note that evidence from clients entirely supports claims made by Father Figures staff on the provision offered.

8.1 Accessing potential participants for the evaluation

It proved harder to access and establish the views of fathers involved in one-to-one work than those involved in group-work, and younger fathers were harder to access than older fathers. This access process highlighted not only the difficulties in engaging fathers in specific activities but also the skills of the project team in successfully engaging men in their provision. It also calls for specific and well-resourced mechanisms for gathering feedback from clients in future evaluations.

Access to fathers (13 in total, 3 under 19 years) involved in group-work occurred via face to face introductions at group activity sessions. All encouraged the evaluator's participation and observation of group activities and older fathers forwarded writings on their views of the project after these meetings.

A sample of nine fathers who were ex-clients or only engaged for a relatively short period of time were contacted by the researcher and five resulted in telephone interviews. Contacting young fathers and those currently involved in one-to-one work proved more difficult. Six fathers were contacted by the researcher but only two were interviewed (one under 18 years) despite repeated attempts. Of course, this might reflect the fact that these men had not met the evaluator in person, though they had been introduced to the evaluation by letter and verbally via their Father Figures key worker. But, it also highlights that considerable time has to be built into workloads to ensure contact is established and maintained, and trust established, particularly at the initial stages of trying to engage the fathers. Father Figures should be credited for its successes, in this respect. In addition, that fathers involved in group work were most willing to share their views on the project might suggest that their participation in group-work had contributed to their confidence to articulate themselves so clearly.

The current and ex-clients clients (7) that the evaluator did speak to via telephone interviews shed light on other possible explanations. These include lack of personal confidence, busy schedules, and suspecting that

the evaluator might be in collusion with agencies perceived to be policing them:

'They might not think they've got anything worth saying ... or that they won't be able to explain themselves very well' (young father)

'I feel so depressed I wasn't in the right place to talk and couldn't think straight... I'm feeling a bit better now so I'm okay to talk to you'

'I'm sorry I missed them other appointments but I'm working nights and I've got my daughter to look after' (young father)

'I wasn't sure about talking to you cos you don't really know if you're [evaluator] involved with Social Services or police or summat'

That ex-clients were easier to contact is significant in so far as it might suggest that these fathers are more confident about themselves and the role of Father Figures in facilitating this (as interviews evidence), and that the majority are no longer involved with statutory services having successfully emerged through difficult times.

8.2 Referral and Process of Engagement

Most fathers (except one) had been referred to Father Figures by other agencies with Social Workers, Social Services Family Support and the Youth Offending Team being the most common referring agencies. Irrespective of whether the client was referred or self-referred, all said that the first contact with Father Figures was positive. This involved a telephone call in the first instance followed by a face to face meeting with a Father Figures worker who explained the support options available.

8.2.1 Strategies for engagement: 'Stuck with me'

It is important to note that not all fathers take up the option to become involved at the initial stage. Father Figures staff make repeated attempts to encourage participation and overcome some clients' reticence. It is notable that clients emphasised their gratitude for the project worker's persistence at times when they were resistant to help.

'I didn't want to know... he [worker] put up with me not being interested, he stuck with me, he kept coming back and I really value that. He didn't give up on me. That was a new experience for me, not being given up on. Somebody having faith in you .. it makes you think that somebody cares' (young father)

The resource implications of time required to engage clients should not be under-estimated.

8.3 Publicity

Of those interviewed, only two clients had contacted the project having seen Father Figures publicity.

'I saw an advert.. a flyer thing, and rang them up.'

Another contacted Father Figures after picking up a flyer and subsequently attending the showing of the film ' Talking Dads' at the Showroom cinema:

'Their marketing is good. It engaged me'

Others had been referred and therefore had not relied on publicity to signpost the project. Those that had seen the current posters and leaflets judged them as adequate or had no specific views on the publicity:

'I've seen that leaflet and it's okay'

'Dunno, never had to think about it cos I got referred'

It is recommended that Father Figures consult with clients to establish more concrete views on the publicity materials, given the more negative view articulated by some external agents (see section 9).

8.4 Partners' support for involvement in Father Figures

All fathers highly value their involvement with the project (see reasons, below) but there was also a consensus that partners were very supportive and encouraged their initial and sustained engagement:

'She wanted me to get involved and thinks it's a really good thing ... she always says to get in touch with them if we need some help'

Notably, this applied in cases where couples no longer lived together:

'Even though she won't speak to me really she always asks how it is going with Father Figures'

Indeed, one woman who was at her ex-partner's home with their children volunteered to liase with her ex-partner to set up the time for an interview which was successful:

'If you're to do with Father Figures, I'll definitely get him to talk to you'

Several reasons were offered to explain why current or ex-partners supported involvement in the project. These centred on the mutual concern to ensure the father is supported in his role:

'It just sort of signals that I'm serious about getting sorted out'

'It's like a way of showing your commitment to the kids and to her and that you're accepting help'

'My partner really likes me being involved cos they help her and us together when they come to the house'

'She wants me to stay involved cos it helps me with my anger and I'm better at talking to the kids'

These are important findings since they emphasise that although Father Figures focuses on supporting men, this has implications for the rest of the family and extends to supporting partners and children, too (see further evidence below).

8.5 Significant source of support

Fathers regard Father Figures as a significant (and often only) source of support. This highlights the isolation that many experience and/or reticence to disclose issues and troubles to other people.

'I haven't got anyone to really talk to and X (Father Figures worker) is the only one I trust'

'Took me ages to open up with Father Figures and other dads but eventually I did and I haven't stopped since I got going'

'I found it very convivial to talking about being a father. In my experience there's a lot of support for single mums and not a lot for single dads ... Father Figures spurred me on and I got into doing my own research on the stresses on single dads and there's a lot out there and Father Figures prompted me to look at what there was and really, you find out that there's loads of people like you'

'They took me on ... had time for me, at a time when I didn't feel anyone else was listening' (young father).

8.6 Views on provision

Without exception, current and ex-clients expressed only positive views on their experiences with Father Figures. The following extracts provide an overview:

'Just brilliant. Enjoyed it. It's helping me to look to the future, not just the past. Others have always harped on about my past but this is helping me to move on from that' (young father)

'They are very welcoming, inclusive, choice, they give you choice, not under pressure, not judgemental'.

8.6.1 Variety and needs specific provision

Several fathers commented on the importance of the option to participate in a variety of types of provision:

'I didn't appreciate how you get different things out of one-to-one stuff and then there's group work. You don't know that til you've tried it ... I thought I just wanted to talk on my own but I've learnt loads from other dads'

Clients emphasised that provision was tailored to individual needs:

'It's having choices .. you can have a choice about what feels best for you'

'They go on what you need and what might be best for you at that stage'

Extracts below offer further evidence.

8.7 Impact

While impact is difficult to quantify and the evidence cited here is subjective and qualitative in nature, it nevertheless suggests that the impact of Father Figures is both considerable and diverse. The following are a summary of effects with more detailed disclosures below:

- Father Figures is perceived as giving fathers recognition, visibility and, most of all, reassurance:
'Just glad it's there'.
- More positive sense of identity including that of being a father; increase in self-esteem, self-respect and confidence:
'You feel valued by yourself, yourself as a father, feel valued by others, your children, partners, other fathers, and Father Figures workers'

'It's not just about being a dad, it's being a dad on your own, and you discover that you can do it. It sort of gives you power and faith in yourself, sometimes just by talking and listening to others'

'The work gives value and meaning to being a dad'

'It's helped me so much .. I'm so much better now ... I can't think of anything else they could do' (young father)
- Fathers feel 'heard' and Father Figures helps fathers find a voice to articulate themselves; involvement challenges assumptions about fathers and fatherhood:
'.. it challenges what social workers and others think about you, including yourself. Being involved in the film has really helped me say what I need to say' (young dad)

'I see X [Father Figures key worker] every week when he comes to my house and I've been doing the film¹. It's boosted my confidence making the film, I've said stuff I never could say before. It's like given me a way of letting Social Services know that I can cope they go on the past rather than the future and what I am capable of ... that's what I can show in the film. Now the film is finished, X is helping me to go to college to learn a trade and get on. I couldn't have done it without him' (young father)
- Facilitates/uncovers fathers' abilities to articulate emotions, feelings, thoughts, fears etc and provides diverse tools such as talking, creative writing, poetry, drama, games, visioning, filming, dancing and socialising. This also has an impact on literacy skills (including emotional literacy). This is illustrated below in the creative writing by fathers (see 8.7.1 Metaphors for The Father Figures Project).
- More informed (gain knowledge from credible, trustworthy sources i.e. Father Figures workers and other fathers)

¹ Reference to a current film project on young fathers (includes some fathers in prison).

- 'Safety' and 'freedom' facilitated by non-judgemental context and others facing similar issues (see 'Participation in group work and socials' below)
- Enjoy interaction with someone different (i.e. workers - not usual type of professional experienced to date) and using different methods
- Helps fathers to find their power at whatever level - '*safe enough to be honest*'; to become braver at admitting frailty
- Referrals for advice or immediate intervention receive a pragmatic and fast response to need (followed up within one week); response might include sign-posting to other agencies
- Continuity of contact (post-engagement or exit) is highly valued (see 'Significance of follow-up contact' below).

8.7.1 Metaphors for The Father Figures Project

As an alternative means of collecting fathers' perceptions of the project, the creative group work clients wrote short pieces (during group work sessions) that serve as metaphors to illustrate the place of Father Figures in their lives. The following are extracts and the full text can be found in appendix 4.

Task 1. '*If your life were a house, describe the room that is Father Figures*'

.... call it a Utility room. This is my Father Figures room. It's where I can go when I need support. A group of guys who are my cement, plaster and paint. It started as a small room but like Dr Who's tardis once inside it goes on forever. This is the room I use to help repair my life.

* * * * *

*..... Never cold never hot
Thick walls keep it dry and quiet
And once inside you can't be heard
If you rant and rave at the world outside
It can be dark, that's up to you
Or you take torch to light the shadows*

*Even though it's cool, dark
Unused for its original purpose
It's a safe and comforting resting place
Somewhere to sit, to feel good once again
In a solid silence that's private.*

* * * * *

.... conversations in a language familiar to me I can enter or follow the conversations as I wish. Posters on the walls of dads with kids; families. Statistics charts of my own pinned to the door

Task 2. 'Your life is a landscape, where is Father Figures in that landscape?'

*A crescent moon shining in a midnight black sky.
Unforgiving mountains surround this safe place.
Trees reach upwards, branches entwined to form a canopy.
Dappled shadows cast by the moon play on the lush grass below.
This is our place to meet, to talk to contemplate.
A private place.
An oasis in life's desert.*

* * * * *

An island

*This island 2 miles long and about twice as wide
Some trees, no mountains just shallow dips and rises
Sandy white beaches ringing flush vegetation
And a gentle sun shining most times
At the shore, a tethered boat, people disembarking
These people are unloading building materials
Fitting for the environment, suitable for their needs
Each person has a plan, a dream
Some on paper, some just thoughts
The unspoken agreement
That the beach is to be untouched
Except for the communal fire*

* * * * *

*Rolling undulating green grass well-trimmed by sheep. No fences; some rocky outcrops. Warm sunny day with a little cloud. A landscape empty of others. A small quiet stream of peat-filtered water, cold and clear. Took a long walk to get here.
A place of contemplation, not isolation.*

It is significant that all the above contributors are men from working class backgrounds who do not have histories involving creative writing or expressive arts.

8.7.2 Impact on partners and children

Fathers reported a positive impact on relationships with partners and children.

'Once, X [Father Figures worker] was talking to me about me and Jo [partner] not getting on and Jo came in and X talked to both of us and it really helped... we were alright after that and what he said keeps on helping cos we've hardly rowed since' (young father)

'It's been great overall. It's helped me with my daughter...she went off the rails and kept running away and she was been bullied at school and X [Father Figures worker] really helped us think about things and how to communicate with our daughter and things just got better as a result. I'd recommend Father Figures to anyone because of that'

These perceptions are echoed by Father Figures and other external agents and children. One child told a Father Figures counsellor:

'..he [father] listens to what I'm saying.. he shouts less'

A school counsellor also disclosed observed improvements in clients' children's behaviour at school (one senior school girl and one primary school boy). Overall, it was felt that there is an impact on offending behaviour by challenging the culture or breaking the cycle that keeps offending behaviour in place (through different responses, effective communication and other parenting skills etc.).

To gather insights on father's perceptions of their children's views on Father Figures, creative writing was again employed. Fathers in group work were asked:

'What do you think your children think about you coming to Father Figures?'

*'I bet it's fun. He always seems happy when he been there.
He writes a lot and I know he say's he does silly things called "Touchy Feely" but I'm not sure what that is. Not sure I want to know.
I like my Dad going to Father Figures. He always comes home smiling.
I like the social events as well. But most of all I like to know that my dad has so many friends'*

How my child might perceive my FF activity...Daddy leaves me with many monsters, including flying saucers and to write about me, his little monkey – but I'm Swan Lake Barbie, not a monkey.

*How I might explain my FF activity to my child...
Holly, it`s only three hours. It`s a place where I can meet and talk to other dads about how proud I am of you, of my love for you. It`s a place where I can listen and share all the special moments with men like me who have little monkeys of their own.*

As mentioned above, The Father Figures Project primary client is the father but, contrary to some external agency perceptions, support extends to partners and children.

8.8 Participation in group work and socials

Fathers particularly valued the support provided by other fathers (including workers who are also fathers) and the commonality of experience alleviates anxiety that they might be judged and there is reciprocal learning and support:

'They've all been through it in way or another... they know what you're on about'

'You talk to someone who's been there, felt like you. It makes a big difference, You don't feel judged'

Participation in group work had also been instrumental in reducing social isolation and improving confidence and sense of self:

'I'm so different to how I was before I went to the group. I can talk openly and I've got confidence in myself ... and being a dad'

The social activities organised by Father Figures are seen as valuable:

'The socials and trips are great .. it's like time out, gives you a break from heavy stuff and you can just be with your kids and other parents and have a laugh'

'The kids really enjoy it... it's good for them to meet other kids and they get to know about Father Figures and meet the workers and that. It makes it sort of realer '.

8.8.1 Reasons for non-participation in group work

Fathers who had declined involvement in group work said they could envisage its potential as a valuable source of support but for individual and/or practical reasons had not proceeded:

'I'm a bit of a loner and I'd not be very confident to talk in groups'

'My shifts don't make it easy for me to get along to the groups. I couldn't make the commitment. Whereas X comes to our house at times when it fits in with work'

'I'm a sole parent and I work so any free time is spent with my kids .. it would be tricky to get time off in the day to attend group sessions and I don't want to go to the evening sessions cos I want to be at home with my kids'

'I didn't go to the groups cos the individual work I did with X sorted it all out and I didn't need anything more.... If I had problems in the future I'd consider group work, though'

'I'm too depressed to be talking in groups .. X (outreach worker) comes to me and that's all I can cope with at the moment'

8.8.2 Views on separate group work for young fathers

'I don't think they should separate younger dads from older ones. We can learn from them and they can learn from us... some of the dads have got kids our age and they can hear about what it's like to be our age' (young father)

'I liked talking in groups with the older dads. They give you good advice' (young father)

Interestingly, one young father intimated that group work with older fathers provided status and militated against negative perceptions about young fathers, and provided protection and boundaries for behaviour:

'If it were a group of young dads only, they'd be thinking that it's just a gang of scallies .. that's what they will think and like if it's older dads there as well, Social Services and that might think it is more sort of respectable. It's a safer and better

environment, it feels safer with older people there and they'd step in if there was trouble' (young father)

Only one person said that he would be interested in a young fathers group:

'.. because it might be that you'd have something in common with younger dads but I don't know .. could see how it goes'

While the majority of current and ex-clients do not express the need for specific young fathers group work, Father Figures should continue to consult with younger clients on this option, as is their current practice. In the past, the 'A to Z of Fatherhood' course for younger fathers has been offered twice (though the first attempt did not recruit), and there are plans to offer alternative forms of provision e.g. multi media project for young dads.

8.9 Significance of follow-up contact

All the ex-clients interviewed welcomed the contact that Father Figures maintained with them after they ceased involvement with the project. This included invitations to socials and other Father Figures events and information on provision and the evaluation of the project.

This had benefits beyond information sharing. Fathers said it impacted on self-esteem:

'It's nice to feel they remember you and could be bothered to keep in touch. Sort of makes you feel good'

Letters reassured them and reinforced the fact that they could return to Father Figures in the future:

'It's just a gentle reminder that you can go back if you need to in the future. Reminds you that you're not alone with it all'

'I still get invited to events and I welcome that. I'm reassured that Father Figures is there if you want to go back to them in the future'

'I'm not in a place to need it now but I might in the future'

'I went to four or five group sessions and I'd have stayed longer but I got a job on nights ... they write and tell you what's happening and that means I can go back if I need to' (young father).

8.10 Fathers involvement in steering direction of work

Fathers were not explicitly asked for their views on whether they were significant in steering the direction of the work but several referred to being consulted on options for new initiatives (e.g. theatre work, puppet workshops) and social activities. Disclosures also testify that provision was shaped to meet individual needs and hence impacted on the direction of the project.

8.11 'Give something back' – peer mentoring

Fathers who have been involved with Father figures over a relatively long period of time commented that their learning and personal development had been so extensive that they would like to reciprocate by sharing this with other fathers:

'I feel like I've changed and grown so much that I'd like to give something back .. you know talking to other dads about my experience and that I was a mess and never thought I'd come through it and I have and it is possible to have a future and Father Figures can support you to do that'

'I feel like I'd like to share what I've got out of Father Figures with other dads'.

'I'd be interested in helping someone else based on my experience. I've thought about doing that in the future'

Team members and representatives from external agencies also commented on the untapped potential of current and ex-clients to support other men experiencing difficulties in relationships and parenting. Peer initiatives might also be capitalised upon to raise awareness of the project, enthuse clients to become involved in group work and socials and offer mechanisms to access groups and communities who have not previously been involved in fathers work (e.g. Somali Community).

8.12 Exit strategy and outcomes

At present, the project does not routinely document reasons for the fathers exit from the project or have a planned exit strategy. This is currently under discussion together with consideration of options to consolidate skills and learning through a peer support programme (as above).

Information on reasons for exit is valuable both to evaluate the efficacy of interventions and inform future policy and practice. Findings from this evaluation revealed that clients left the project for 3 reasons:

- moved out of the locality
- the issue/crisis had been resolved
- attendance at group sessions was not possible due to securing employment or changes in shift patterns (but need was not acute enough to require one-to-one counselling).

8.13 Other needs?

Overall, the data overwhelmingly suggest that clients are very happy with the project and could not identify weaknesses in content or suggestions for other types of provision :

'There's just nothing bad I can say about it. It's all good' (young father)

'I can't think of anything else they could do, they've given me everything I need'

'When I look back I can't think of anything else they could provide'

However, one father commented that the setting for group work (church hall) could be improved:

'I wouldn't change anything about the content but the setting is .. not depressing but a bit gloomy, school roomy atmosphere. That could have been better'

8.14 Summary and recommendations

Current and ex-clients are unanimous in their praise for The Father Figures Project, irrespective of the length of engagement (from a one off meeting to over 2 years). The project provided them with a range of practical and emotional support, education, new skills (communication, anger management, relationship development, literacy, emotional intelligence, writing, filming, creative arts etc.). Notably, for many, Father figures provided support, direction and guidance when these men felt isolated from family, peers and other agencies. It appears from this evidence that Father figures provided a service not provided by anyone else.

It is recommended that

- funding be identified to ensure the continuation of the project
- at least one father should be a client representative on the Advisory Group.
- funding be explored to develop a fathers mentorship and peer support initiative. This should include funding for related training/employment, skills transference and enhancement
- a dedicated Fathers Support Website should be developed. Clients should be intrinsic to the development and maintenance of the facility. Among a plethora of uses, the site could signal the support available from Father Figures and other agencies, advertise events, share experiences and provide an additional means of communication between fathers themselves and staff and clients
- Father Figures continue to consult with young fathers on their preferences regarding specific provision for young fathers
- Father Figures consult with clients to establish more concrete views on the publicity materials
- Regarding future research/gathering evidence, it is recommended that:
 - time and resources be built into the strategy for fathers (who do not attend group activities) to meet with the researcher in person, prior to any data collection (e.g. interviews)
 - Father Figures consider mechanisms for obtaining feedback from clients who are primarily involved only in one-to-one work on a routine basis (perhaps every 3 months).

9 EXTERNAL AGENTS' VIEWS & PARTNERSHIP WORKING

In total 11 representatives from key stakeholder agencies were interviewed in person. This included representatives from the Youth Justice Team, Youth Offending Team, Sure Start Plus, Early Years and Childcare Service, Social Services Family Support, Sheffield Family Service Unit, Ante-natal Maternity Services, Hospital and Home Education Service, Teenage Pregnancy Unit and Lloyds TSB Foundation. Of course, the views of these interviewees may not reflect the views of those not interviewed (either through not responding to the request or because resources did not permit) and therefore should not be generalised. However, the findings shed light on the effectiveness and strengths and weaknesses of the project

The results from these interviews have been presented thematically. Again, where appropriate, themes are supported by extracts from the interviews. Interviewees have been anonymised.

Themes

9.1 Fathers on the agenda, 'filling a need'

Agency representatives report that Father Figures has had a definite impact on raising the profile and significance of fathers, creating a more positive perception of fathers and fatherhood, questioning stereotypes, and developing understanding and awareness of needs

'What was there before Father Figures?'

'We value Father Figures for getting dads on the agenda'

Some interviewees were clear that if Father Figures did not exist then work with fathers would cease:

'If Father Figures was not there then no one else would be doing the work'

9.1.1 Strategy – visibility of fathers

Those involved on a routine level have a more positive and affirming stance on the significance of fathers. In some arenas, this is beginning to percolate through to middle management and is now visible at the strategy/policy level e.g. 'Parenting Strategy Group'. Three interviewees commented that Father Figures had made significant advances in its strategic positioning and aim to get fathers on the agenda:

'They are represented at the right meetings at the right level'

But, it was also emphasised that this had been difficult because of fixed histories and priorities:

'It's not been easy cos the process has not been facilitated by other agencies. Everyone is fighting for their own interests and these are historical and often

immutable. Someone high up at the strategy level needs to take overall responsibility for a greater inclusivity'

9.2 Evaluation of Father Figures' provision

Overall, of all external agencies interviews, there exists a unanimous view that

'Father figures has a considerable talent in helping fathers to understand themselves and work more effectively with their children'

'... once fathers get involved, Father Figures does brilliant work'

'The service is innovative, determined and encouraging'

'Father Figures is at the forefront of developing work with fathers .. a real strength is the way it has been adapted to clients and the media and arts based stuff is very powerful'

'I'd recommend it as a model for working with fathers and getting fathers work up the agenda in Sheffield, in the region and nationally'

Similarly on young fathers:

'What we want [as a referring agency] for fathers is what they provide'

'The quality of what they do is excellent'¹

Various Father Figures training and dissemination events have been evaluated positively by delegates. For example, in January 2004, Father Figures contributed to a training session for Sure Start Projects, with a screening of their film 'Talking Dads', followed by workshops, discussion and feedback sessions. Participants' responses included:

Truthful, brave, powerful, moving thought provoking, sad, angry

Notably, input challenged views and suggested ideas for new work:

'.. it made me think about the need to work with separated fathers'

'... challenged my perceptions and inspired thought'

'.. promoted a lot of new ideas.

'... I will personally try harder to engage fathers and understand where they are coming from'

Participants felt the film and workshop could be used in a variety of contexts for specific work on fatherhood (e.g. in schools to teenagers as part of sex education/parenting, GP practices) and as a starting point to discussion of broader issues (e.g. men and masculinity).

9.2.1. Incomplete knowledge of provision

Interviewees are aware of the project's multi-faceted approach. All assert the uniqueness of the project and feel it contributes to its success. But, three interviewees described Father Figures as '*different*' with some intrigue about '*what they actually do?*', and, in some cases, a lack of

¹ See further discussion below in section on 'Young fathers'

accurate awareness of provision that might have implications for their level of engagement with the project (see further discussion below).

9.3 Extent of inter-agency working

To re-iterate an earlier point, Father Figures regards partnership with other agencies as central to success:

'Partnership working is a backbone for success'

All those interviewed agreed with this principle and felt that inter-agency working was effective with some asserting dramatic improvements over the past 12 months since staffing levels have increased. However, there are varied perceptions of what constitutes inter-agency working. Some agencies describe a truer sense of collaborative inter-agency working through involvement in a range of activities including Advisory Group membership (and regular attendance), participation in Father Figures events and conferences, making referrals, specific joint agency initiatives, and, in the past, training events. By contrast, some agencies' involvement remains at the level of referrals, rather than proactive support for closer partnerships. Levels of engagement often seem dependent on individuals and their commitment to prioritising fathers. In these organisations Father Figures is not structurally built into policy and strategy in ways that ameliorate dependency on individual motivation and perception. Hence, regular collaboration, communication and information exchange, other than specifically relating to individual clients, does not occur.

In explaining the lack of more routine collaboration, it is notable that all referring agency representatives interviewed emphasised the stresses and varying priorities that each other operated under and which can militate against more pro-active partnerships. However, a majority would welcome closer collaboration, visits from the project staff and training events to enhance their knowledge of the project's provision (see more below) and personal skills:

'The co-ordinator used to visit us about twice a year and that was really useful in letting us know what they could provide and I went to training events on what they do in group work and that is really useful to know about'

9.3.1 One way partnerships – external agency responsibilities

Though a majority of agencies requested more input on staff training about working with fathers and awareness raising about the project, some also admitted that the partnership arrangement was not reciprocal insofar as support and collaboration from their agency to Father Figures was not proactive or forthcoming. For example, not requesting a visit from Father Figures despite identifying a need:

'We wait for them to come to us'.

Or, not forwarding useful information to Father Figures:

'Information sharing has to come from us, too'

One interviewee suggested that referral mechanisms could be more efficient and routinised, and be less dependent on individual preferences, if the agency showed more commitment to working with Father Figures:

'Somebody could trawl our clients and look at families that might be appropriate for referral to Father Figures ... we all have our pet projects that we go to and we need to think more about who we refer to. We should get Father Figures in to ensure that all staff know about them so that they don't get passed by cos you as an individual haven't referred to them before'

Inevitably, stretched capacity and high workloads account for some of this but interviewees believe that support for Father Figures at management level could lead to enhanced referral rates and awareness of Father Figures provision.

Another significant issue is that Social Services Family Support is limited to working with clients for three months only. This has implications for the relationship to Father Figures. The referral to Father Figures usually occurs towards the end of the 3 month period and Social Services Family Support is not resourced to support the transition to the client working with Father Figures. Effectively, the case is passed over to Father Figures though there is no formal transition agreement. This means liaison between the two agencies to maximise effective outcomes is not resourced and referrals that do not take up the support from Father Figures are not followed up, and reasons remain unknown. It was suggested that Social Services explore funding options to:

- support closer working relations and liaison between Family Support and Father Figures
- facilitate clients taking up support by Father Figures
- support the work Father Figures undertakes after the 3 month intervention by Family Support expires
- conduct routine audits of case files and establish client appropriateness for referral to Father Figures.

A service agreement is suggested as a means to formalise arrangements and ensure all workers are familiar with Father Figures as an option for referral.

9.4 The Advisory Group

Half of those interviewed were members of the Advisory Group though only three attended regularly. These three said that the meetings served a purpose *'to catch up with project staff and other agencies'*. However, information gathered could only be viewed as partial because of poor attendance. Some regular attendees said the remit was unclear and *'a bit directionless'*. Though the priority to develop strategy was recognised it was said to be difficult to achieve because key groups were not present at meetings, different people attended each meeting, and the information sharing role had begun to take precedence:

'We spend too much time on introductions cos there's different people there each time, then on information sharing which is good for making contacts but leaves too little time on what Father Figures is doing or discussion of anything strategic'

For some, prior commitments made it difficult to attend as meetings tended to be organised at relatively short notice. Those who did not attend routinely were unclear of the group's remit. Those who were not members did not know of the Advisory Group's existence.

Section 5.2 discusses this issue in more detail but here it is worth reiterating that the purpose of the Advisory Group warrants review. The options for achieving its function in networking and information sharing through alternative means should be considered (e.g. Members could agree to provide a brief written résumé of key developments prior to each meeting that could be circulated in hard copy).

9.5 Tensions

Some interviewees referred to problems that had previously marred effective partnership. These included lack of understanding; clashes of ideology, personality and ways of working; differences in priorities; and lack of feedback on the progress of new proposals:

'Basically we didn't have enough time or resources to understand each other properly and if things didn't work out first time then we didn't have enough time or inclination to sort it out and try again'

Two agencies said their priority had to be the primary carer and in most cases this was the mother,

'This meant we couldn't prioritise dads and it created tensions with Father Figures'

The evaluation of Sheffield Sure Start Plus (Hirst et al., 2003) echoes this finding.

Another said that during the early stages of the Father Figures project it was difficult to promote engagement with the project because some workers operated a '*gender filter*' that prioritised work with women. The resultant lack of support from workers on the ground together with fathers' reticence to be recruited created problems:

'The number of dads engaging in anything was difficult including Father Figures'

At this stage in the project, there was no referral system so a capacity issue terminated early joint initiatives.

There had been a growing acknowledgement that work with fathers had been neglected in the past:

'Fathers have been ignored for too long. Father Figures is trying to change that'.

Another said her agency had initially not been very responsive to the project because it was felt to be:

'.. too ambitious ... it needed to crawl before it could walk'.

One interviewee said the referral process took too long and information sharing on new developments had been lacking. Though this had not deterred the informant from referring to Father Figures it had been frustrating, and he was unaware that referrals were now followed up within 7-10 days and that two new workers had been appointed. This evidences the need for the project to share new developments more routinely. Another agency representative cited lack of feedback on the progress of a proposed new initiative (following initial discussions on specific initiatives) as problematic

'We get all excited then nothing happens ... we need to know why'

Though this interviewee accepted some responsibility for not pursuing explanations, the project has ultimate responsibility for explaining lack of progress (no funding) if frustrations are to be avoided.

It was suggested that Father Figures does not sufficiently acknowledge the other agencies and types of work with fathers that are currently taking place in the city:

'They sell themselves as the only agency doing work in Sheffield with fathers. Some agencies are doing work and others aren't that could be. But it should be acknowledged in positive terms and think about how to allow partnerships to develop'

Anecdotes have also reported Father Figures' criticism of mainstream services and such feedback will not help perceptions of the project or partnership opportunities. A mutually supportive inter-agency strategy that campaigns for fathers in *all* services while recognising the resource constraints on some agencies/projects is recommended.

Most asserted that these earlier issues/problems had been resolved:

'We used to have very frank discussions about our different way of doing things but that's all behind us, I'm a big fan of the project now'

Others said that tensions were beginning to be addressed:

'We're continuing to talk about things... keeping the door open is very important'

'Norms around masculinity are changing and the gender filter isn't as fixed so there's more work opening up'

All those who mentioned problems in inter-agency working commented that they admired the Project Co-ordinator's passion, commitment to the project and tenacity, even if it felt overwhelming, at times:

'It can come over as arrogance but it is well-intentioned and passionate'

'.. he's so enthusiastic you get intrigued by it'

It is notable that several interviewees agreed that given the limited resources and newness of the project, and the local and national context, this passion and tenacity are what had sustained the project:

'If it hadn't been for the Co-ordinator's passion, it might not have survived. Others go under when there's so little money and enthusiasm from other agencies'

'You have to give him due credit for keeping at it. It's really hard to have the energy to keep it going. You have to really believe in it'

'My experience is that Father Figures is operating in the context of a battlefield with different priorities and histories at a local and national level. In this context there's only so much anyone can do and I think the Co-ordinator has done that amazingly. There's further work to do but they are getting into the right circles'

9.6 Knowledge on Father Figures - information exchange and referrals

As indicated above, some external agency representatives and referring agencies do not have up-to-date information on the project. Four interviewees were unaware that the project had employed two outreach workers and hence unaware of the project's enhanced capacity for one-to-one support, and some interviewees demonstrated a vague or inaccurate knowledge of services on offer. Though most knew that group work was based on creative/drama-based methods, some did not feel they had a clear enough knowledge to describe it with any confidence to potential clients. Some of those interviewed relied on attendance at the Advisory Group to gain information on current developments. Those who do not attend Advisory Group meetings regularly (or at all) had least up-to-date knowledge and were particularly unfamiliar with the nature of the group work. Since the Advisory Group is not fully effective in this respect and attendance levels are poor (see Section 5), it is important to ensure that information exchange occurs through other methods.

9.6.1 Creative group work

Another significant factor that might influence decisions on whether to refer a client is perceptions and/or experience of the creative group work undertaken by Father Figures. One interviewee said they were wary of creative arts-based approaches and hence found the Father Figures way of working *'challenging'*:

'I'm just not used to that way of working so it makes me wary'

Another interviewee admitted not being fully aware of the nature of group work which again rendered wariness but also lack of confidence in making informed recommendation about the project to prospective clients. Though neither said this would prevent a referral it would be a factor in assessing the suitability of a client for referral. It is important that Father Figures offer routine training on their group work approach and disseminate feedback on clients' views of group work to ensure judgements on a client's suitability for referral are based on sound evidence and assessment rather than personal opinion or resistance to a particular method.

Those who had attended training run by Father Figures and experienced group work for themselves stressed that the content and methods impressed them:

'No one else is offering this sort of thing. It can be very beneficial and should continue'

However, for one interviewee, the appropriateness of group work is judged in a context of the referring agency's inability to provide additional support and resources for closer liaison with Father Figures:

'It's pretty powerful stuff ...I attended a training session and it brought out stuff that I didn't expect.. I have to consider this when I'm thinking about a referral as to whether it would be right for a client as it might be too much for a client at that point as it can be very intensive and might exacerbate the tensions at home. But, this is all part of our problem in making referrals and not being able to support the client with issues that occur as a result or for closer liaison with the project. I'm not saying it isn't potentially valuable but there are risks'

This illustrates that Father Figures may not be utilised, not because of the provision on offer but because of shortcomings in resources of the referring agency that do not facilitate a supported referral and engagement with Father Figures.

9.7 Publicity

Father Figures publicity includes a poster, leaflet and credit card. Interviewees had mixed views on the content but these views are dependent on how significant one views publicity materials. One view is that posters are not a key resource in engaging fathers with direct contact and other agencies being more important in referring clients to the project (Father Figures client numbers increased three fold in 1 year due to agencies referring more people, not publicity). Fathers Direct recommend (see Burgess and Bartlett, 2004) that written materials should not be seen as a 'stand alone' recruitment tool (pg. 19) and that it is misplaced to put too much faith into the recruitment potential of written publicity materials. The alternative view is that publicity is very important in encouraging men's interest. This latter group felt current publicity is uninspiring:

'It's a miserable looking thing .. wouldn't inspire me to contact them'

'.. it might be there and I don't recognise it but it doesn't jump out at you'

'Needs to be more personal, user friendly, catchy, inclusive'

'Don't feel it says anything to black men'

'Doesn't appeal to young men'

While project staff assert that the leaflet is not intended to target men from minority ethnicities or age groups, there may be implications both for self-referrers (for whom the publicity may not appeal) and for referring

agencies (particularly those less familiar with the project working) who conclude that the project is not appropriate to particular identities. As one interviewee commented:

'I agree it doesn't identify any particular group but I think it should. An element of being all-encompassing is that it can lead to excluding minority groups. I think the project should let themselves be known to all groups and let them decide if they want to work with Father Figures'

The project could signal the desire to engage more clients from minority ethnicities by making the leaflet available in a variety of community languages (as recommended by Burgess and Bartlett, 2004) and by working more closely with community elders.

Some external agents also commented that they had not seen any publicity (in agencies they would expect to see it) for two years. Another said more publicity was required in schools, GP surgeries and other organisations:

'I can't recall seeing any publicity materials lately'

While posters and leaflets have been widely disseminated in the past, repeat distribution may be required with a request to ensure leaflets etc. are displayed. This highlights the need for active joint working and repeat requests to promote the service.

However, enhanced publicity is intended to enhance referral rates and the project must consider whether it has the capacity to fulfil this potential increase in demand.

9.8 Young fathers

Currently, young fathers enter the project via referrals from a number of agencies. Sure Start Plus has a working policy to signpost young fathers to the Father Figures Project but poor referral rates to date may reflect the low number of young men who have contacted Sure Start Plus (see Hirst *et al* 2003 for discussion). The Hospital and Home Education Service feel that Father Figures is an appropriate agency for referring young fathers but that the main access pathways (referrals and publicity) to Father Figures were not always effective in engaging young fathers and that alternatives, such as, accompanied visits could be considered. Lack of clear information on project activities, particularly group work, also influence abilities (as above) to feel confident in making referrals. One external agency requested separate group work for young fathers because it was felt young fathers might be reticent in the presence of older fathers. However, this is not a view shared by those young fathers currently involved in group work (see 8.8.2). In a review of needs, fathers were unanimous in saying they did not want specialist provision and did not want their age to factor in group work:

'.. don't want to be treated as a young father. Just as a father'

Father Figures continues to view young fathers as a priority in current and future work but the project alone cannot meet the demand for provision and plethora of needs and a successful strategy will require more support from other agencies, than has been the case in the past. The impetus to promote work with fathers has been slow because of the local context (as discussed above) that has not prioritised fathers or fatherhood in policy or practice (see also Hirst 2003; Hirst *et al* 2003). However, changes in personnel, discussions between the Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator and Father Figures and the intention to conduct a mapping exercise on boys and young men's needs and examples of provision, signal moves forward.

Strategies for engaging more young fathers should capitalise on the contacts made with young mothers by the Hospital and Home Education Service, and Sure Start Plus. The Hospital and Home Education Service is keen to work more closely with Father Figures. Sure Start Plus has not referred as many young fathers as might be expected but by its own admission its priority has been young mothers (Hirst *et al* 2003). Future developments, such as, the planned half day with Sure Start Plus and other stakeholders on work with young fathers, will hopefully render closer partnerships and routine attention to meeting the needs of young fathers as well as mothers.

9.9 Funding

It is significant that delegates who attended the interim findings day and some interviewees commented that though there is support for The Father Figures Project, funding from their agencies has not been forthcoming. As one agency representative said:

'The seed has been planted, we're happy with the growth but not willing to water it with hard cash.'

If senior managers want Father Figures to continue this needs to be mirrored in contributions to funding:

'Key stakeholders must take the initiative and provide repeat funding. It would be a travesty for it [Father Figures] to cease existence now'

9.10 Future developments

Interviewees made suggestions for building on existing services and new developments but stressed that these were made with an awareness that Father Figures had limited resources:

- **More involvement in preventative strategy**

It was suggested that Father Figures could contribute to the work of PSHE Advisers and teachers in schools and to the 'Healthy Schools' initiative. Work in schools was also suggested by Father Figures staff.

- **Consultancy and specific training events**

Generic training on skills development (especially group work) and guidance/consultancy on working with fathers and developing exit

strategies (see below) was requested for agencies less familiar with fathers work.

- **Parenting course**

Father Figures is asserted as having the knowledge and skills to provide parenting course for fathers, by those interviewed. One said,

'The time is right and Father Figures can do it'

But, both external agency representatives and Father Figures staff raised issues that suggest this needs careful appraisal.

- national policy is promoting parenting courses but debate should explore whether provision is a kneejerk response and whether it is the most effective way of meeting needs as identified by fathers themselves
- Other research suggests parenting courses are regarded as effective by users and providers but they have huge resource/capacity implications and funds would need to be diverted from other initiatives or new funding sources identified
- Father Figures is credited for its diverse provision and ability to meet individual needs without any time impositions. Some clients or agencies may request 'parenting' input because of a crisis/immediate need (e.g. parenting order) but it is suggested that not all fathers would function best in the context of 'parenting skills' course; it might deter some clients from becoming involved if they have to 'sign up' to a whole course; and it would be difficult to match provision with a plethora of individual needs. Also, the project is receiving new types of client from the professional classes who prefer one-to-one support
- Parenting courses imply time limited work but bringing about change can not be time limited in this way. A majority of clients have a longer journey
- The provision of more parenting classes raises the issue of priorities and how to allocate funds. Other requests include more 'drop-ins', one-to-one work and training events.

Overall, the question is whether parenting courses are the most effective way forward in bringing about longer term and sustainable change?

Nevertheless, a specific request from the antenatal service to run a parenting course is being followed up.

- **Peer support and exit strategy**

All those interviewed were very keen to see peer support initiatives developed:

'I love the idea of mentoring by fathers.. it's much better if it comes from someone who's been through it'

'It would be a potential way into minority groups.. could talk about what Father Figures provides'

It was felt that Father Figures could lead the way in devising innovative approaches to clients' exit from the project:

'They could do a good job of exploring skill mechanisms to assess requirements of individuals and direct the break point with support and confidence'

'Our agency has trouble letting go of clients or them letting go of us. It can feel like a dependency. Sometimes it's unclear why some are still a part of it. Father figures have the skills to guide us on this'

- **'Rolling the project out' and locality based support**

It was felt that the project should be resourced to develop provision for fathers in other areas:

'There's many areas without work with fathers. It would be good to see this sort of initiative rolled out across the region'

Provision based in specific localities was also suggested. Two interviewees mentioned specific minority ethnic communities (Yemeni and Somali) and one recommended consideration of rolling the Father Figures model out to rural communities.

9.11 Conclusions and Recommendations

From the perspectives of external agencies, most agree that despite early challenges The Father Figures Project has been successful in putting fathers on the agenda in Sheffield, changing the culture to improve perceptions of the importance of fathers in families and children's lives, providing a much needed service for fathers (that might not be available otherwise), developing liaison and referral mechanisms and positioning fathers in policy and strategy on parenting and children. There is also recognition that the task has been difficult and taken place in a context of minimal mainstream support.

The following are recommended:

- Strategies for better sharing of information and learning among partners. A Father Figures newsletter is suggested as one way to disseminate project news
- More active collaborative work e.g. training and visits from project workers
- Future planning could consider the negotiation of a clearer strategic position in relation to key local trusts and strategic partnerships e.g. Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board and Children's Trust
- Service agreements between key referring agencies (e.g. Social Services) could enhance the efficiency of referral mechanisms and follow up support. The agreement should include detail on mechanisms for referral, support for the transition to Father Figures and subsequent liaison and feedback between the referring agency and Father Figures on clients' progress and outcome

- The issue of whether to prioritise resources on targeting men from specific communities or age groups (tailoring publicity and courses) requires further inter agency discussion
- Options for jointly funding peer mentorship work should be explored
- Key agencies to consider options for core funding to Father Figures routine work with fathers and families
- Explore possibilities for working in schools (e.g. PSHE, Health schools Initiative)
- An inter-agency strategy that is mutually supportive and campaigns for fathers in *all* services while recognising constraints on resources and other priorities.

For further discussion of factors influencing partnership and practice, see next section.

10 FACTORS INFLUENCING PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND EFFECTIVE WORK WITH FATHERS

These data combine findings from fathers, project staff, representatives from external agencies and documentary evidence.

10.1 Factors/issues that facilitate effective working

- Recognition of need
'In my agency we were keen to get work with fathers up and running so Father Figures came at the right time'

'There was so much work to do and no one to do it til Father Figures came along'
- Longevity (4 years).
'Just being around for a while increases their visibility and chances of success'

'As you get to know them and what they do it makes it easier to work with each other'
- Learning over the years has helped the project to consider the most productive approaches. This has meant acknowledging variations in agency priorities and different approaches to working with clients:
'..being more understanding and compassionate of other agency realities and pressures, mechanics and systems .. and histories of partnerships'

The Father Figures Project Co-ordinator said the Project Administrator is important in facilitating this.

- Tenacity and looking for alternative ways forward
'We don't stop if it feels important.. think of new ways to take things forward'

'You have to admire their energy and tenacity. Some people would have given up... given that the context was not geared towards work with dads'
- Uniqueness of the model
'They are providing something very different ... not just their client group but the way they do it'
- More staff – this allows more time for reflection and planning; developing closer relations with other agencies; strategic planning (since other workers employed, Co-ordinator has more time to work at mainstream strategy level)
- Tangible outcomes/visible products (e.g. presentations of work, films, anthologies of fathers' writing etc.) provide constant reminders that the project is productive

- Integration and liaison with existing services e.g. Sure Start, PCTs, Teenage Pregnancy and Young Parenting Strategy (the outreach workers bring experience and contacts with Sure Start and PCTs)
- Strong administration and data capture systems enhance efficiency of the project and improve client tracking and mechanisms for feedback to referring agencies
- Information exchange pathways improving
- Universality – fathers of diverse ages, experience, cultural backgrounds etc. access the project. The project feels this is a strength but it can also be seen as a weakness since it may not facilitate prioritisation of specific groups/communities.

10.2 Factors which constrain/ed effective working (in past or currently)

- An enormous agenda. The scope of provision for 'fathers' work is huge (with men, partners and children) and there are ripple effects regarding the scope of issues that it can cover (e.g. sexual politics, masculinity, young fathers, sexual health, crime, social inclusion, regeneration, education etc.)
- The city had little if no previous culture or history of working with fathers but it was not a blank canvas. Potential partnership agencies had pre-existing politics and targets that prioritised support for women and mothers and not fathers
- New language and practice of inclusivity had/has to be acknowledged and learnt e.g. in the document 'Teenage Pregnancy Unit (2004) Teenage Pregnancy: an overview of research evidence' fathers are not mentioned until the final page
- Lack of recognition for work with fathers undertaken by mainstream agencies and other projects
- New way of working - creative arts-based work was/is unfamiliar and challenging to some
- Information exchange – this is developing and improving but there is still work to do. Some external agencies are not fully aware of Father Figures work and some are unconfident in making informed recommendation to fathers. Feedback on new proposals should be routinised

- Current access pathways (referrals and publicity) could be expanded to engage more fathers. Options suggested are: invitations to socials, Father Figures attendance at venues/projects frequented by young fathers and accompanied visits to Father Figures events
- Publicity (poster/leaflet/credit card) - some regard the publicity as uninspiring and not catchy enough to attract attention (implications for self-referrers). Its universality and unavailability in community languages will influence its ability to attract men from minority groups
- While all interviewees agree that the effects and impact of the work with fathers is difficult to quantify and the impact is often long term, they also recognise that an evidence base is necessary to justify priorities and funding. This highlights the importance of the routine collection of evidence based on fathers' (clients) testimonies and feedback to the project
- Too little time (one to one work is resource intensive).

10.3 Conclusion

As Father Figures has become more established and the size of the team has increased, it has increased its potential to overcome barriers to effective working, had more time to reflect on ways forward and meet the demand from clients and external agencies. Many of the barriers could be remedied by additional funding and some will require specific internal actions by the project. However, some barriers could be ameliorated by more pro-active working on the part of external agencies.

11 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Father Figures is achieving its aim to provide a support service for fathers. Its organisation and development provides an effective context for future growth; this should not be sabotaged by lack of funding.

11.1 Effectiveness and Organisational Development

Increase the size of the team to meet demand for networking, liaison, strategy and policy development and one-to-one client support.

Continue to review and document the Father Figures model of provision and refinement of data capture systems and share information and learning with external agencies.

Allow time for reflection and fuller debate on issues topical to fathers, families and children; and planning and prioritising. As well as regular team meetings, enhanced levels of funding should be identified for staff development, project review and development (four dedicated project review days per annum are recommended).

11.2. Strategic Development

Sustainability beyond April 2005 - funding and strategy: irrespective of short term funding constraints, the project should plan a longer term strategy and goals for the next 3-5 years. Joint funding should be identified for a consultancy exercise to review external agency needs and opportunities for inter-agency/project working.

To preserve the work specifically targeted at fathers (including that with partners and children) some ringfenced funding should be maintained.

Strategy, goals and interim measures (with timescales) for funding should be regularly reviewed and publicised.

Key stakeholders, agencies and strategy groups (notably 'Children and Young People's Partnership Board', 'Parenting Strategy Group', 'Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Board' and other areas of strategic development in health, Sure Starts, Mental Health, Midwifery and Parentcraft, etc.) should consider the findings and recommendations from the evaluation and feedback their response in writing.

If recommendations are accepted, key strategy groups and external agencies should include Father Figures in strategy and dedicated funding. Options for funding include:

- routine core funding over a minimum of 3 years
- funding for specific support initiatives e.g. fathers peer work, young fathers projects, work with fathers from minority ethnic backgrounds
- seed corn funding for exploring flexible responses to other agencies, that is, new initiatives and alternative modes of provision
- setting up a virtual information network e.g. Fathers Support and Information website;
- funding for Father Figures to serve as consultants/advisors as a mechanism for rolling out the Father Figures model (but not actually providing it) in other agencies and localities.
- funding for Father Figures to run 'training the trainers on fathers and fatherhood' courses.

11.3 Partnership and Inter-Agency Working

Review Advisory Group purpose, remit, and membership (include a fathers' representative).

Review and develop relationship to local trusts. This process should be facilitated by or in partnership with a senior strategist in a local trust or other key stakeholder.

Continue to develop links with other agencies and mainstream support services. Encourage involvement in inter-agency training and awareness-raising events, and disseminate project information and developments, widely.

Explore and develop options for funding sustainability beyond April 2005 (see *Strategic Development* above)

Disseminate information to referrers on data capture progress and outcomes.

Draw up service agreements on referral procedures with key agencies.

Work collectively with other agencies providing support to fathers and campaign for change in all arenas.

Consider an inter-agency Fathers Forum to encourage city-wide and more routine participation in debate, policy and planning on

fathers and fatherhood, and to meet the broadening agenda of needs. The Father Figures Advisory Group would form one of many groups that could bring issues to the Forum.

11.4 Provision

Publicity: Review current publicity materials and strategy. Consider impact on demand of enhanced publicity. If budget and resources permit, raise and refresh awareness of Father Figures via reminder publicity for related staff/professionals and other relevant agencies; consider translating written materials into community languages; and seek ongoing exposure in local media (radio, TV, print).

Hard to reach groups: consider developing strategy for inclusion and publicity (in particular to include young fathers, those from minority ethnic communities and male school students involved in pregnancy). Equally, develop awareness-raising and specific training around supportive provision for particular hard to reach groups such as looked after young people and care leavers.

Provision in other locations: continue to develop proactive relations with other providers and offer consultancy/training to roll out support initiatives in other areas.

Models of good practice: develop routine mechanisms for sharing learning on 'what works' and new approaches to supporting fathers and families.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide for current and ex-clients

Introduction

- Introduce self, thanks, aim of interview, time required
- confidentiality and impartiality
- consent to note taking
- how information used

Cues for questions

1. General ice-breaking/relationship question.
Establish brief domestic situation
2. Initial contact process / referral mechanism
Describe process; how did you find the process (if contacted them yourself - was contacting easy/hard?)
3. History of experience, type of provision (group, one to one etc.?)
Ask clarifying questions.
4. Reflections/feelings on experience? what have they done for you? - whether it helped and why?

General ...

Impact on self, partner, children? Establish specifically how it has impacted ... give examples. Offending behaviour?

Were you able to choose what support you wanted? Tailored response?

Longer term impact?

5. How did you find out about Father Figures?
Publicity
6. Other needs... any gaps in provision? Location and timing?
7. Views on widening utility of the service? Work with young fathers?
Separate provision?
8. Generally, would you say that Father Figures has made a difference to your life? (in a good or bad way?)... 3 words to describe it?

9. What are key other agencies that are important to you? Do they link to Father figures? How? Explain.
10. Is there anything else you would like to talk about that we have not covered, or any questions you would to ask me?

Invite to Interim findings day and final report conference

Appendix 2: Interview Guide for Father Figures Workers

1. **How long been employed** by The Father Figures Project?

- FT/PT/%wte?
- Clarify/detail your role

2. **Nature of service** - in team interview we discussed the sort of service that is being created - **philosophy, methodology, intentions** ... first have you anything to add to what said in team interview?

Pick up on some issues ... (if not mentioned above)

- What are specific positive factors that support the development of the service?
- What are specific factors that constrain the development of the service?
- What developments would you like to see?

Any comment on other issues raised in Father Figures review day ... e.g. accessible base? Data capture systems? Designated Fathers Centre?

3. **Provision & Referrals** - FF originally set up for fathers with children at risk of/involved in offending ie to contribute to a comprehensive strategy for reducing youth offending ... is this still the case?

- **criteria** for accepting and not accepting referrals?
- **Widening provision:**
 - **Types** of provision ... seen development of new types of provision eg social activities, creative writing etc. ...any reflections on these developments or other specific initiatives?
 - **Views on location and timing** of activities?
 - **Views on widening utility** of service – e.g. involving more young fathers; sustaining engagement with the project?
 - **Further needs?** (link to reference to stretched capacity & lack of time mentioned in review day)
- **Impact:** Like to pick up on **intentions/ outcomes** .. very difficult to answer but what, do you feel, are the **effects on fathers?** (confidence, control, discipline, parenting skills, ... (quote) 'depression', sense of isolation', self-esteem ...?
effects on families and children?
for fathers and children ... impact on **actual or potential risk taking** and/or **offending** behaviour?
longer term impact? Hopes for longer term impact?

- **Partners, other agencies/services, referral system**

What is your experience of being involved in referral process?

What/who are the key agencies that are useful/necessary to work of Father Figures? Explain.

- What PROMOTES effective partnership and referral?
- What INHIBITS partnership and effective referral?

Some external agents said not enough feedback on progress & developments. Any views?

4. Your needs

- What are specific positive factors that support your effective practice in FF?
- What are specific factors that constrain your effective practice?
- What developments would you like to see? (do these match with those in Q2?)

5. Model - What distinguishes Father Figures from other projects?

- What factors are key to the potential for this Father Figures Project being modelled in other areas?

6. Overall evaluation of the service offered (anything not yet mentioned? Achievements, strengths, weaknesses?)

7. Three words to sum up your experience of the project .. please elaborate

Appendix 3: Interview Guide for Other Providers & External Agencies

1. Role/Name of agency representing?

- What is your role in relation to The Father figures Project?
- How long been involved?
- Extent of experience? advisory? referrals?
- Reflections/experience on involvement in specific initiatives ... location and timing of activities? Explain answers.

2. What sort of service is being created? .. philosophy, methodology, intentions?

.. seen developments in **types** of provision (in line with feedback from clients and other agencies eg social activities, creative writing etc.) ...any feelings about these?

- **Views on widening utility** of service – e.g. involving more young fathers; widening provision to include young fathers, sustaining engagement with the project?

3. [Hard to answer] **but what do you think is the effect on fathers?**

... on families and children?

... on actual or potential risk taking behaviour and/or offending?

Longer term impact?

4. **Partnership, referral system and engagement**

- If you have referred to FF - what are criteria for you making referrals?
- any criteria for not making referrals?
- FF originally set up for fathers with children at risk of/involved in offending ie to contribute to a comprehensive strategy for reducing youth offending ... is this still the case? Views?
- any views on whether involvement should be compulsory eg as part of Parenting Order?)

- How was your experience of referral, other involvement?
- Advisory Group? Experience? Views? Purpose and efficiency?

- What factors promote effective partnership and referral?
- What inhibits partnership and effective referral?

- Feedback on progress and development... Some external agents said not enough. Any views?...is this linked to your level of involvement? Seeking out information? Attendance at Advisory Group meetings? ... how proactive would you say you are?

5. Development

- What specific factors might support the development of FF?
- What specific factors are or will constrain the development of FF?
- Views on widening utility of service? – e.g. involving more young fathers; sustaining engagement with the project?
- What developments would you like to see?

6. What distinguishes Father Figures from other projects?

- What factors are key to the potential for this Father Figures Project being modelled in other areas?

7. Overall evaluation of the service offered (anything not yet mentioned? Achievements, strengths, weaknesses?)

- Say three words that sum up your experience of The Father Figures Project ... elaborate if wish

Appendix 4: Creative writing by clients

Father Figures ... An oasis in life's desert

CB radio on a school-type wooden table, oak stain; wooden floor, oak stain. One large patio-type window which lets in plenty of light; general chitty-chat on CB, conversations in a language familiar to me but which to others might seem a little hard to follow. I can enter or follow the conversations as I wish. Posters on the walls of dads with kids; families. Statistics charts of my own pinned to the door.

'Your life is a landscape, where is Father Figures in that landscape?'

*A crescent moon shining in a midnight black sky.
Unforgiving mountains surround this safe place.
Trees reach upwards, branches entwined to form a canopy.
Dappled shadows cast by the moon play on the lush grass below.
This is our place to meet, to talk to contemplate.
A private place.*

An island

*This island 2 miles long and about twice as wide
Some trees, no mountains just shallow dips and rises
Sandy white beaches ringing flush vegetation
And a gentle sun shining most times
At the shore, a tethered boat, people disembarking
These people are unloading building materials
Fitting for the environment, suitable for their needs
Each person as a plan, a dream
Some on paper, some just thoughts
The unspoken agreement
That the beach is to be untouched
Except for the communal fire*

*Rolling undulating green grass well-trimmed by sheep. No fences; some rocky outcrops. Warm sunny day with a little cloud. A landscape empty of others. A small quiet stream of peat-filtered water, cold and clear. Took a long walk to get here.
A place of contemplation, not isolation.*

How my child might perceive my involvement with Father Figures:

*Daddy leaves me with many monsters, including flying saucers and....
to write about me, his little monkey – but I'm Swan Lake Barbie, not a monkey.*

Holly, it's only three hours. It's a place where I can meet and talk to the dads about how proud I am of you, of my love for you. It's a place where I can listen and share all the special moments with men like me who have little monkeys of their own.

Appendix 5: Interim Findings Meeting

Purpose

- ◆ To bring together key stakeholders (service providers and clients)
- ◆ To share progress on the evaluation and interim findings
- ◆ To maximise opportunities for research to inform practice (during the evaluation, as well as after completion);
- ◆ To provide an opportunity for stakeholders to comment on and discuss issues raised (and add to the existing data);
- ◆ To agree the subsequent trajectory of the evaluation

Programme/content

10.30. Coffee, introductions to each other; introduction to day (Father Figures Co-ordinator)

10.45 Overview of interim findings (Julia Hirst)

12.00 Comments and questions in relation to 3 areas:

1. Comments on findings to date
2. Queries/areas for further research inquiry
3. Issues for Father Figures to follow-up

Participants were invited to comment in the whole group and/or

(i) anonymously by writing comments on post-it notes and sticking these to the appropriate board (as in 3 options above).

(ii) contacting the evaluator after the event by email, telephone or post. (cards with this contact information were handed out to each participant)

The evaluator noted comments made and wrote them up as data that contributes to this final report.

12.45. Lunch, networking and further discussion.

Key points from meeting

- The turn out from external agencies was disappointingly low (representatives from Jessop Wing, Lloyds TSB Foundation, FSU, Sheffield Magistrates Court, YOT, Social Services Family Support) but debate was, nevertheless, very useful and constructive. Apologies were received from the Service Manager and Specialist Learning Mentor, Hospital and Home Education Service; Jessop Wing Parentcraft Midwife, Manager, Sharrow Sure Start; Personal Advisor, Sheffield Sure Start Plus; Sheffield First for Safety x 2, Director, Sheffield Teenage Pregnancy Unit.
- All findings were accepted as representative by those present.
- The major concern was the urgent need to secure new sources of funding by September 2004.
- Father Figures agreed to pursue discussions on joint working with Jessop Wing (contribution to parentcraft classes)