

ENIL – European Network for Intergenerational Learning: Report on Intergenerational Learning and Volunteering

The United Kingdom: Men Behaving Dadly: Greenway Primary School

Organization implementing the project

Name: Greenway Primary School
Country: The United Kingdom
Web site:
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Context

Male participation in Family Learning is typically low whilst numerous studies and research indicate male involvement in a child's education has been found to be associated with children achieving greater educational attainment; better peer relationships; fewer behavioural difficulties, and lower likelihood of criminality and drug use later in life (*21st Century Dad, Equal Opportunities Commission, June 2006*).

The Green Way Primary School is located in an area of significant social and economic deprivation. The Index of Multiple Deprivation rates the area in the top 10% 'most deprived' areas (*IMD 2010 chart for E01012917*) and is "...approximately double the size of the average primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is considerably above the national average." (*OFSTED 117792*)

In order to break the trend of a lack of male involvement it was imperative to ensure that the fathers were immediately engaged by the content of a Family Learning course. Typically (but not exclusively), fathers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds tend to be engaged by kinaesthetic activities rather than those of orthodox learning methods. After lengthy discourse with the fathers, it was mutually decided to progress this cohort onto a short joint programme aimed at developing the learning relationship between father and child.

Action

Following a successful Christmas craft Family Learning workshop at The Green Way Primary School, Hull, aimed at engaging male parents/carers and their children, a cohort of fathers/male carers of children at the school indicated a desire to progress onto further Family Learning courses.

The fathers enrolled on a ten week *Dads In The Picture* course which is part of the *Men Behaving Dadly* programme. The course needed to be flexible and responsive in order to retain these participants. It was important to remember that these male parents had mostly not been in an educational setting since leaving compulsory education themselves. Typically, their own experience of education was negative: their dialogue regarding education was largely in the pejorative and they found new teaching content, methods and techniques disenfranchising. For various reasons formal education had failed them but they had themselves begun to recognise that in an increasingly competitive world their children needed male parental support to maximise their potential as young people.

Initial learning aims focused around dismantling these pre-conceptions and barriers towards education; invigorating the parent not only with self confidence in their own

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ability to support their children but also the positivity that contemporary education and schooling can herald for today's children.

Regular input was given from the school's *Phase 1 Leader* (responsible for children aged 5-7) as well as the use of the school's facilities and resources to undertake kinaesthetic activities from cookery skills to woodwork projects. These activities allowed the fathers and children to work, communicate and simply enjoy the time learning together.

A visible change in attitude became apparent as the course progressed: a sense of pride and enjoyment with a strong essence of spending 'quality time' with their children. The fathers themselves recognised that as their own learning relationship developed with their children there was also a change in attitude towards educational activities by the children. This motivation became cyclic as positivity replaced negativity and belief replaced doubt. The fathers began to see themselves as a group and as stakeholders – and took the collective name of 'The Dads' Club'.

In terms of the gender of the staff working with male parents/carers it is important to note the work of the female crèche worker on the course, who was there primarily to assist the tutor and the young children. However, her role was not to be underestimated in terms of building relations and adding a female perspective during the course. Often practitioners will state that fathers respond better in an all male environment. I would argue that sometimes this is true, but in terms of balance and certainly where children attend the sessions, a female presence can and did prove of value as a positive role model for children comprises of roles for both genders.

The *Dads in the Picture* course culminated with a visit to a local park and the presentation of certificates of achievement to the fathers in front of the whole school. This was consistent with the support the school had given throughout and highlights the value the school placed on fathers learning in school together with their children.

Outcomes and Impact

In terms of success, The Green Way Dads' Club, formed by the fathers to improve outcomes for their children is a success story in its own right that should be celebrated. The continuing work with the school has been forged on trust and dismisses the often accepted notion of the 'invisible parent' by recognising the important role that fathers have to play in the lives of children. The value of this partnership should not be underestimated; indeed one father stated that his child's work 'is the best thing that he has seen in a long time' as a direct result of working with his child.

This group are now progressing on to an accredited programme in September 2011; again this will be with their children and in partnership and support from the school. Learner records, evaluations, photos and voice scripts are all available through Family Learning that reinforce the success of The Green Way fathers to date. From a tutor's point of view it is important to see how the fathers have grown in autonomy and self belief, how families have been strengthened and the positive effect this has had on the children as a whole.

Quotes (from participants)

I've really enjoyed my time on the course and I would encourage everyone else to take part

I really enjoyed it so I've signed up for more

Brilliant experience and we ran a stall at the summer fair and raised money for the school

Wish we had done it earlier I have a new relationship with my daughter and communicate a lot more and new friends

I've been inspired to go on and do more for the school, I now volunteer as a parent reader and helper in the school