

Submission to

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The inclusion of fathers should be a key objective of the Early Years Learning Framework and of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care.

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The importance of partnerships with parents

The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care discussion paper and the Early Years Learning Framework both stress the importance of early childhood services adopting a partnership approach with parents and families. The National Quality Framework cites research showing that the “long-term benefits when support is provided to parents” and that positive outcomes for children were linked to “effective and respectful partnerships with parents”.¹ The family is also included among the *Values and guiding principles* of the Early Years Learning Framework; educators are enjoined to “develop collaborative relationships” with parents so that “Families are encouraged and supported to engage actively in children’s learning and development from birth.”²

‘Parent’ does not include fathers

While the terms ‘parents’ and ‘families’ used in the National Quality Framework and the Early Years Learning Framework are undoubtedly intended as inclusive, neither document acknowledges the reality that fathers are not included as partners in early childhood settings. Among family services, the widespread belief that fathers should be involved in caring for their children has not resulted in successful recruitment of fathers. Early childhood services aiming to support families are, in most cases, accessed by mothers.^{3,4}



The evidence-base for involving fathers

The research evidence of father's influence on children's well being is recognised by both the United States Government Department of Health & Human Services and the United Kingdom's Departments of Education and Health. In the US 'responsible fatherhood' is promoted specifically through Child Care⁵ and in the UK "core standards" to be met by children's services, include a directive to include fathers.⁶ Government and non-government organisations in non-western states have also supported research and program development to increase father participation in childrearing including participation in early childhood services.^{7,8}

Strategies to include fathers are available

A recent review of the national and international evidence of father involvement in Children's Centres found that where services actively sought paternal involvement through father-specific policies, publicity, staffing and program development participation rates for fathers (even those from vulnerable groups) could be lifted.⁹ The Father-Inclusive Practice Forum held in 2004 documented several examples of successfully engaging fathers in early childhood services¹⁰ and FaHCSIA's recent Father Inclusive Practice pilot demonstrated the effectiveness of mentoring in improving services' ability to recruit fathers from a range of backgrounds.¹¹ In the key area of male staffing (males currently make up less than 4% of the early childhood workforce¹²) a male mature age worker strategy for child care was successfully piloted in 2005 and resources for recruiting and training male early childhood staff are freely available¹³.

Conclusion

The evidence of fathers' influence on children's development, the widely acknowledged community support for more equal participation by fathers in child rearing and the importance of parent participation in child care activities support the inclusion of fathers should be a key objective of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. The availability of resources, guides and examples of good practice should enable father-inclusive practice, including the

recruitment and training of male staff, to be embedded in any Early Years Learning Framework resulting from the reform of the early childhood sector.

References

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