**Intergenerational National Network**

Meeting on 24 February 2016 at the Melting Pot, Edinburgh

**Present**

Pat Scrutton Intergenerational National Network

Cathy Sexton Fathers Network Scotland

Tim Porteus Midlothian Surestart

Jonathan Sher

Annie Brown East Ayrshire Volunteer Centre

Anne Connor Outside the Box

Ankale Denovan Falkirk Council

James Spence Storyteller

Ros Parkyn

Morag Letson Action for Children

Darryl Mead Reward Foundation

Jo King Starcatchers

Adelle McGregor Action for Children

Susan Morris Open Social Enterprise

**Apologies**

Gail Cassidy

Leonora Montgomery

Chris Dunhill

Anne Horn

Edith Macintosh

Mandy Clarke

Morag Smith

Anne Munro

Mary Rasmussen

Beryl Homan

Alan Hatton Yeo

Lesley Dunbar

Henry Simmons

Louise James

Daryll Archibald

Douglas Guest

Jonny Pickering

**1. Welcome and introductions**

Pat welcomed everyone, and thanked Fathers Network Scotland, particularly Douglas Guest and Cathy Sexton, for their support and generosity in hosting this meeting of the Intergenerational National Network.

All present then introduced themselves.

2. **Year of the Dad**

Cathy Sexton, Project Manager

Douglas was, sadly, unable to attend because he was at home with a sick child, but Cathy had agreed, at very short notice, to give a presentation on the Year of the Dad, for which she is the project manager.

Fathers Network Scotland (FNS) was founded in 2008 by David Drysdale. It is a gender equality organisation, with equal numbers of men and women on its board. They promote the greater involvement of fathers in childcare, and encourage workplaces to respect this more equal role. They recognise that, in fact, historic roles are already changing. Now the thinking needs to catch up with the behaviour.

They have received funding from the Scottish Government to run the Year of the Dad. The campaign was launched at Edinburgh Zoo in January. The launch received a great deal of very positive publicity, both in the press and across social media. There is a real feeling that they are catching the zeitgeist. This meeting was one of a series of events they will be holding, hosting and supporting throughout the year.

The National Parenting Strategy acknowledged the importance of both mothers and fathers’ involvement with their children’s lives, both in the early years and throughout their lives.

Gary Clapton, who is a member of the FNS board, has done work on ‘father-proofing’. There are mixed feelings about the use of this term, which is intended to reflect the need to ensure that services, workplaces, etc. are father-friendly, but could be interpreted negatively, on the lines of, for instance, waterproofing, as being exclusive rather than inclusive. Tim added that the emphasis should not be on the fathers, but on the well-being of their children.

In the 1970s, fathers typically spent 15 minutes a day with their children; now it is more usually 2 – 3 hours. When services talk about families, they are often referring to a mother and her children. Gary looked at images, including those in GP surgeries, and found that very few featured men.

When the National Guidelines for Child Protection were first drawn up, they focused on mothers and children; now they explicitly include fathers.

Year of the Dad aims to challenge some of the myths around fathers, including this invisibility, and to open up discussions.

They aim to help organisations to understand that parenting leave is good not just for the family, but also for the organization, whose employee will be less liable to be stressed and more likely to be loyal. They will encourage organisations to think about how they treat fathers, including their use of language and of images.

Fathers who are principal carers often feel isolated and alienated when they find themselves in groups of parents, all of the rest of whom are mothers.

On 12 February a Year of the Dad conference took place in Edinburgh. It was attended by almost 300 people. The presentations from the day will all be on the website ([www.yearofthedad.org](http://www.yearofthedad.org)). The website will also include films; papers; resources to facilitate change; examples of good practice; and lots of stories.

Cathy quoted Gloria Steinem, “Women are not going to be equal outside the home until men are equal in it”.

3. **Stories of dads through the generations**

Tim Porteus, Midlothian Surestart and storyteller

Tim began by telling a story about a granddad from Penicuik, who is a passionate armchair footballer, watching his 3 year old granddaughter doing something he had never seen before. It was both a melancholy and a transformative moment, when he recognized that, as a working dad, this what he had missed out on with his own children.

Cultural change is happening. The patriarchal dam is gradually breaking down, originally in response to pressure from women.

People often think that all or most philosophers are men. This is the case with published philosophers; but women live it.

Some years ago Tim was looking after his 6 year old daughter at a playpark. She had been a bit clingy, and he was delighted that she was playing happily on the equipment. Then he felt a hand on his shoulder. A policemen and policewoman asked him what he was doing there, and clearly did not believe that he was looking after his own child until he called her over. He still will not go back to that playpark. Such experiences internalize men’s sense of exclusion from the nurturing role.

This is also one of the reasons men feel excluded from, or at least uncomfortable in, nursery and primary schools. It is as if men’s sphere of interests does not include children!

Tim has been working with a primary school on a ‘dad-proofing’ programme. The school sits in an area with a lot of challenges, and itself regularly experiences violence, bulling and exclusions. Historically, there has been little parental involvement. The staff are overburdened with targets, and there has been a culture of failure. Through the programme they are introducing a range of cultural activities, including a visit from an opera singer (who was asked to perform ‘Go compare!’!, and storytelling.

Tim emphasized that this is not just about dads; it is fundamentally about children and about a transformation in parenting at a grassroots level. It is about restoring self-esteem and about healing people’s emotional lives.

It is genuinely awkward to be the only man in a group of women, for instance at Bookbug sessions. It is about creating a space which is not intimidating for men. Tim is running the sessions alongside a male teacher, and the children now associate the sessions with their dads. Some of the dads are clearly flourishing as a result.

Middle class professionals and older dads tend to be more comfortable with the challenges posed by such situations than younger dads in working class communities, where they may have grown up with a ‘hard man’ culture.

In parenting classes almost all men have an ambition to spend more time with their children. One man asked his (female) boss for a more flexible working schedule. Her response was ‘But you have a wife at home’! He put in his notice.

We need to celebrate and support dads who can and do spend time with their children; but we also need to focus on the next generation; on young men **before** they are dads. We need to help them to develop their identity as men in a way that includes the idea of nurture. Part of the problem is that many of them do not have a positive role model. Another is that young fathers often do not have a sense of entitlement, with which would come a sense of responsibility.

Tim ended with a film, ‘The Big Deal’.

4. **Pre-conception health and parenting: a lifecourse education issue**

Jonathan Sher

Jonathan noted that, in Scotland, grandparents are increasingly involved in the lives of their grandchildren. Some 10,000 grandparents are de facto parents. Some of these are officially kinship carers, but there is a conspiracy of silence about the even greater number who take on parental responsibilities on an informal basis. If the relationship is a formal one, they are entitled to some payment and support. On the other hand, some grandparents are unwilling to make their role known in case the children are taken away from them. But this may mean that they are unsupported.

Also increasingly common is for grandparents to undertake the daily care of their grandchildren when both of their parents are working. The cost of childcare is headline news, but the extensive provision of care by grandparents and aunts and uncles is a crucial intergenerational issue which is hidden. Ignorance is not bliss.

Jonathan has been undertaking some work on pre-conception health education and care, and has two reports due out soon. He believes that, in Scotland, we have a blind spot about this. We talk about, and act on, avoiding pregnancy, and pregnancy itself, but we ignore the time in between. The best indicator of the well-being of both the mother and the baby is the mother’s physical and emotional health at the time of conception; but we do not pay any attention to this.

In Scotland we talk about women ‘falling pregnant’, which implies passivity.

There is also a responsibility on the rest of society to raise the next generation of parents; all of us, at all stages of the life course.

Jonathan offered to send his reports to anyone to whom they would be of interest.

5. **Discussion**

James is a storyteller and the father of a twelve year old son. He is ‘non-resident’ (a term many people are not happy with), but does have contact with his son. He pointed out that fathers matter in both positive and negative ways, through their presence or absence; but there is no scenario in which they do not matter.

Ankale was brought up by her father; it was her mother who was non-resident, which was very unusual in the 1970s. However, her father was surrounded by women who nurtured him in his role. One of the benefits for her is that she is very self-sufficient at practical tasks.

There is an issue about the self-worth and self-esteem of non-working fathers.

Tim reminded everyone of something that is often forgotten, which is how exhausting hands-on parenting can be.

Anne spoke about a television programme, ‘Back in time for the weekend’, which is looking at the changing patterns in the way we spend time.

Jonathan added that the experience of grandmothers and grandfathers raising their grandchildren can be very different. Grandfathers are often raising a child for the first time, because they were not present to any meaningful degree the first time round.

Annie noted the importance of mentoring for young men. Tim agreed, adding that he would like to work with 15 year old boys, working with a young dad and using dolls, teaching them to change nappies, and helping them to learn that this is part of being ‘a real man’. No father is perfect; it is about encouraging them and building their capacity.

Jo told the group that Starcatchers ([www.starcatchers.org.uk](http://www.starcatchers.org.uk)) is celebrating its tenth anniversary. Their message is that, alongside literacy and numeracy, creativity has a crucial role. They work with children and families from pregnancy and for the first five years.

In 2013-14 they ran a pilot, ‘Expecting Something’. They worked with groups of up to 25 young mums from pregnancy, but struggled to engage with the young dads. The group met weekly for an artist-led creative session. The programme is now running in Wester Hailes and Fife, and dads are coming along too.

Jo confirmed that the artists are approximately half women and half men, and agreed that it is also important to ensure that images are balanced.

James spent some time collecting stories about fathers. He found six stories, but it was difficult He has worked with fathers groups and says to fathers, ‘Some day the child you don’t see will come to see you and ask what happened’.

Morag reported that Action for Children are working with dads aged between 14 and 25. It is a challenge to engage with them. One thing they have found helpful is to work with St. Johnstone Football Club. Working in Clackmannanshire is a challenge for a different reason; the villages are very territorial and so working across them is difficult.

They have also done some work in Glenogle Prison, where they were shocked at the very poor contents of the toy cupboard. The good news is that the prison is embarking on a parenting strategy.

They also have plans to work in schools, and have a set of ‘virtual dolls’.

Tim said that one of their biggest successes has been a ‘Dad’s adventure playgroup’; the children drag their fathers along!

Darryl is an adoptive parent; he adopted his wife’s child. He works for the Reward Foundation, which works in sex, love and relationship education. They have a particular interest in the use of the internet and the consumption of pornography. Stranger danger is real, but statistically it is much more likely that abuse will take place at home or within the family.

Jonathan noted that some Scottish neonatal units offer ‘kangaroo care’. Skin to skin contact with both mothers and fathers makes a real difference, particularly for premature babies.

His comments led on to a brief discussion about cultural differences in raising children, such as children sleeping in their parents’ bed.

**6. Date of next meeting**

Provisionally 22 June at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh