

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CROSS PARTY ASSEMBLY GROUP ON FATHERS AND FATHERHOOD

Held in Conference Room 23, Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay

Date – Wednesday 14th September 6pm to 8pm

Attendance –

Mark Isherwood AM – Chair, Neil McEvoy AM, Michelle Brown AM

Paul Apreda – secretary

A total of 37 other individuals were in attendance including the National Adviser on Ending Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

AGENDA

1. Welcome and introductions – Mark Isherwood AM

Apologies received from Janet Finch-Saunders AM and Neil Hamilton AM.

Paul Apreda (secretary) apologised to the meeting for mix up over the use of the Eventbrite registration system. Concerns had been raised that the wording of this could be interpreted to mean that attendees were required to make a donation to the charity. Attendance booking systems for future meetings would make it clear that this was not the case.

Individuals were invited to contact the Secretary if they wished to receive a full refund

2. Guest Speaker – Erin Pizzey – Are Fathers Disposable?

Erin spoke about her early childhood – having been born in Tsingtao, China. She was brought up by violent parents – both mother and father, and she learned to imitate their violence. She saw how this impacted on the children in her family. Erin established the world's first DV refuge in Chiswick in 1971. She worked initially only with women but came to realise that men also needed help and could be victims and perpetrators. She recalled that 'Funding was available for women's refuges but no-one wanted to fund a refuge for men.' Erin stated her belief in gender equity and called for a greater commitment to working together to tackle the issues.

She stated her belief that a politically Feminist Ideology perpetuated the view that women are victims and men perpetrators. She felt that this view prevented appropriate support from being provided that would start to tackle the underlying problem of inter-generational family violence that results in children remaining vulnerable. She stated that 'The state (through the benefits system) has replaced the traditional role of men as father and provider'.

3. Question and Answer session

Contributions from the audience included statements that men are often their own worst enemies as they fail to recognise when they are victimised and also fail to act collectively to address that problem, and that most statutory and third sector services see men as the problem and look to exclude and marginalise them despite rhetoric to the contrary. Other contributions felt that great strides had been made in addressing inclusion and although more needed to be done there was much that was positive and to be encouraged.

Neil McEvoy AM stated that he stood on a platform for shared parenting in the recent Assembly elections – and was a proponent of equality. He believed that a cultural change was needed that moved away from the £5m a year DV ‘industry’ in Wales, and that services need to have a policy in place when a child raises DV issues.

Michelle Brown AM – stated that she had written a dissertation on residence and contact issues in the Family Court as part of her university degree. She saw the need to reward good parenting by fathers – who treated others with respect and received it in return.

The discussion then moved to a wider range of issues around paternal parenting – including initiatives around Parental Responsibility and the Welfare Reform Act 2009 that provides the legislative framework for compulsory joint birth registration. The lack of formal recognition of ‘Parental Alienation’ by Welsh Government was discussed. Moves had been made by FNF BPM Cymru to persuade the Welsh Govt. Family Justice Network to formally recognise this but had been rejected despite positive response from professionals to a series of seminars on the subject delivered by Karen Woodall.

The meeting concluded with a summing up by the Chair, Mark Isherwood AM – who recognised that the issues for fathers spanned the devolved and non-devolved settlement eg Cafcass Cymru was the responsibility of Welsh Government. Social workers needed to maintain a focus on skills and development. The chair informed the meeting that he was a Patron of the British Assoc. of Social Workers. It was suggested that much work was needed to be done to raise awareness of the issues and engage with members of the Assembly. The key matters from the meeting will be taken forward and acted upon in a letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children. A letter will be drafted by the Secretary on behalf of the CPG drawing attention to the key issues within the Cabinet Secretary’s portfolio.

The meeting closed at 8.10pm

DETAILS OF NEXT CPG MEETING

6pm – Wednesday 23rd November – Conference room 21 – Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay.

External visitors **MUST** register to attend here

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/myevent?eid=28658581589>

I confirm these are an accurate minute of the meeting of the CPG - Mark Isherwood AM