

Name of Cross Party Group: FATHERS AND FATHERHOOD

First Annual General Meeting

Date: 13th June 2017 - 6.00pm – 8.00pm

Location: CONFERENCE ROOM A, TY HYWEL, CARDIFF BAY

In attendance:

Name	Title
Mark Isherwood AM	Chair/ Assembly Member for North Wales
Neil McEvoy AM	Assembly Member for South Wales Central
Paul Apreda	Secretary, CPG Fathers & Fatherhood – National Manager, FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru
Dr Sue Whitcombe	Family Psychology Solutions
Paul Apreda	Secretary of the CPG / National Manager, FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru
Gwilym Roberts	Relate Cymru
Keith Whitcombe	Member of the public
Alun Watkins	Member of the public
Councillor Dan De’Ath	Member of the public / Cardiff County Councillor
Jordan Holbrook	Member of the public
Gwynne Davies	Member of the public
Steve Bayliss	Member of the public
Richard Bradford	Member of the public
Tony Stott	Member of the public
Mark Davies	Member of the public
Dr Vikesh Chouhan	Member of the public
Simon Millington	Member of the public
Charlotte Balcombe	Member of the public

Apologies:

Name	Title
Michelle Brown AM	Assembly Member for North Wales
Janet Finch-Saunders AM	Assembly Member for Aberconwy

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Summary of Meeting:

Mark Isherwood AM opened the Annual General meeting by welcoming all of the attendees and introducing Dr Sue Whitcombe.

There were no nominations received for the positions of Chair and Secretary and the meeting confirmed that Mark Isherwood AM was re-elected as Chair and Paul Apreda as Secretary.

Parental Alienation – ‘practical steps to addressing alienation’

Dr Sue Whitcombe of Family Psychological solutions delivered a presentation on the subject of Parental Alienation. Dr Whitcombe had spoken at the Annual Conference and AGM of Families Need Fathers at Bristol in March 2017 on a similar subject. She is an expert on the subject and works in the family court to identify cases of alienation and provide solutions to parents, children and the Courts.

Dr Whitcombe defined the subject of parental alienation – including Implacable Hostility, Hostile Aggressive Parenting, Attachment Based Parental Alienation and Pathogenic parenting with reference to the academic literature on the subject including Kelly and Johnson 2001 and Fidler, Bala and Saini (2013).

Parental Alienation (PA) is the unjustified or unwarranted rejection of a parent where there was previously a normal range, loving, good enough relationship. PA is the intentional or unintentional actions of a parent (usually the Parent with Care) to turn their child or children against the other parent (usually a Non Resident Parent). Over time the child becomes hostile, vitriolic and abusive before rejecting the parent and refusing contact.

In her own studies false allegations of abuse featured strongly in the cases she has dealt with. 67% of cases identified false allegations of DV being made by an ex-partner while 81% of cases featured false allegations of child abuse against the alienated parent.

It is important to recognise that Parental Alienation exists on a spectrum from mild to severe and that responses need to recognise that reality and design interventions and outcomes accordingly.

General discussion

Many of the attendees shared their own insights into the phenomenon of Parental Alienation – some doing so through personal experience of being an alienated or ‘target’ parent. It was noted that a Petition to the Welsh Assembly had attracted over 2,000 signatures on the issue of recognition of parental alienation by the Welsh Government. Responses to the initial

submission of the petition by the Cabinet Secretary for communities and Children were not felt to be particularly helpful by attendees.

Welsh Dads survey – interim findings from the 2017 survey

Paul Apreda shared the interim findings and some of the data from the 2017 survey of fathers and father figures in Wales. It was significant to note that the response rate had doubled to 419 individuals. Every Local Authority was represented with the largest response coming from Cardiff with 92, with helpful numbers from Blaenau Gwent (32), Caerphilly & Rhondda Cynon Taff (31 each), Carmarthenshire (28), Bridgend (25) and Merthyr and the Vale of Glamorgan (20 each).

The proportion of respondents who identified as Non Resident parents – ie a parent who did not live with their child for the majority of the week had fallen slightly to 13 ½%.

‘Stand out’ data included the fact that almost 57% of the respondents cared for their children equally or more than the other parent. Positive experience of health & education outweighed the negative by more than 2.5:1 However 2/3rds felt that their role isn’t valued equally with the mother’s by authorities & society and that nearly 80% think the Government should do more to help fathers. Negative experience of Cafcass Cymru in the Family Court (4:1) was even greater than that of social workers in Local Authorities (3:1) 2/3rd of fathers had no experience of parenting support BUT there was a big increase over previous surveys in the positive comments from those who had.

The individual comments of participants was a significant element in the published survey – that can be viewed here https://www.fnf-bpm.org.uk/image/upload/branch/cymru/WELSH_DADS_SURVEY_2017_report_FINAL.pdf

A new question had appeared in this year’s survey around mental health and well-being. This highlighted that many fathers experienced poor mental health as a result of stresses of parenthood. One alienated father had left a very worrying comment that concluded the survey report.

‘I never stop thinking about taking my own life. There is NO help available. I just want to share my daughters’ lives, that’s all. I don't want to be told I'm depressed etc etc. I know that. My life has become totally impossible. I never did anything wrong. I have lost my entire family who have chosen to believe my Ex's lies and my children's not wishing to see me being my own fault. I am completely alone and will almost certainly kill myself at some point; which, as all the mental Health specialists acknowledge, would be a perfectly rational and reasonable thing to do. It’s only about....when?’

It was noted that the Welsh Government had refused to require services to monitor the gender split of parents they supported. It was felt that this led to scenarios where fathers were marginalised and ignored while at the same time 'lip service' was paid to inclusion through guidance emphasizing the value of engaging fathers.

Action Points

- Look at a date and subject for the next meeting of the CPG probably in November 2017. Inviting representatives from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Fathers will be given consideration.
- Prepare a list of topics to raise with the Cabinet Member for Communities and Children to improve engagement with fathers specifically addressing the problem of data recording.