

FIRA is a national alliance of researchers, community organizations and father dedicated to the development and sharing of knowledge on father involvement.

FIRA is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's Community University Research Alliance Program (CURA).

Program Goals

To create a vital and sustainable network of people interested in enhancing father involvement

To increase Canadian research and knowledge on father involvement

To inform public decision making, community development, and policy development

To develop tools, resources and training to be used in practice

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Feature article

Report from the New Fathers Cluster

Canadian Community Organizations and New Fathers¹

A recent report prepared for the New Fathers Cluster by Ed Bader of the Catholic Community Services of York Region and Andrea Doucet of Carleton University highlights programs, activities and services offered to new fathers at community, health and parenting organizations across Canada. The document summarizes the results of a survey designed to gather the opinions of Canadian community organizations concerning best practices for supporting new fathers.

The New Fathers cluster focuses their work on support for fathers during the period from pregnancy through the first eighteen months of the child's life.

The following is drawn from the summary of the project's main findings.

"Most organizations are aware of the need to provide programs that focus on the different needs of mothers and fathers in the pre-natal, birth and post-natal periods. While the majority of organizations offer programs for mothers and fathers together or have it as an implicit policy that fathers are welcome, there are many organizations that make an effort to provide materials or programming that is focused on providing programs or materials that are father-friendly, or for fathers only, in order to encourage men to partake in what can be viewed as a mother-dominated stage of parenting. As indicated in many academic studies, it may be the case that the transition to parenthood is gender-distinct and that the pre-natal, birth, and post-natal periods are ones that require a particular sensitivity to the needs of fathers as distinct from those of mothers. Organizations seem to be acutely aware of this.

"Fully half of all organizations surveyed have a staff member whose mandate *includes* (although not exclusively) the task of involving fathers in programs and activities. At the moment, practice still lags behind intention as many organizations have highlighted the need for greater attention to the factors that would assist them in providing better services for new fathers.

"Pre-natal programs are more focused on mothers and fathers together, while about 10% also have pre-natal programs for fathers alone. Most highlighted that it was hospitals and not their organization that was the active center in the birth experience. Nevertheless, for those who did have programs, these included birth-giving facilities where fathers are

Activities

FIRA works to accomplish its goals by:

- ❖ Engaging for change through seven fatherhood research clusters which explore issues related to immigrant fathers, gay fathers, separated and divorced fathers, young fathers, indigenous fathers, new fathers, and fathers of children with special needs
- ❖ Creating a Canadian knowledge base on father involvement
- ❖ Policy analysis.

Foundation Partners

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A complete list of partners is available on our website.

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invited to hold the child after birth, cut the cord and assist in examining the baby. In the post-natal period, most organizations offer programs, activities and resources for mothers and father together while many also offer initiatives for fathers only. Between 30-40% of organizations offer father-only programs. These include: playgrounds which dads are encouraged to use with their young children; scheduled parenting programs for fathers only; father-child recreational activities; and support programs for fathers.

“Organizations also highlight the barriers to fathers’ involvement and, conversely, the resources that would assist with father involvement. Many such facilitating resources revolve around: fathers-only programs in order to balance out the dominant ‘mother-focused programming’; the use of male facilitators in fathering programs and activities; meeting hours (evenings and weekends) that are more conducive to inviting working fathers’ participation; and the adoption of a ‘father-centered philosophy’. Unique and interesting ways of encouraging greater participation by fathers include: recreational activities for fathers and children; sporting and recreational activities as avenues for getting dads together; and having ‘activities with food’ (e.g. father-child breakfasts or lunch and cooking classes for fathers).”

To obtain a copy of the full report, please contact Ed Bader at ebader@ccsyr.org or Andrea Doucet at andreadoucet@sympatico.ca. ■

¹Included by permission of the author.

Our Favourite Websites

RuralFathers.com at <http://www.ruralfathers.com>

For a subscription fee, this site provides access to information about developing successful fatherhood programs and the education of fathers and children. It includes educational materials, staff training resources, an evaluation tool, and an e-bulletin board. For free, users can subscribe to a monthly newsletter of tips, information, and ideas for program implementation and maintenance. Includes links to several US fathering programs.

Fathers Direct at <http://www.fathersdirect.com/>

From the UK Department of Education and Skills and the Parent Fund comes this site which offers information about research studies, policies, practice, and case studies. Organized by topics, this page includes a wealth of information. Subscribe to their free newsletter which provides news updates and information about recent publications.

Of particular interest to practitioners is the *DAD Pack*. This resource, which can be purchased in lots of twenty copies, includes materials which may be distributed to fathers. Topics covered include myths about fatherhood, a road map of child development for ages birth through five years, a guide to rights and responsibilities, 100 ways to praise a child, and information about money management.

Dads & Daughters at <http://www.dadsanddaughters.org>

The goal of the Dads and Daughters organization is to help fathers *inspire, understand and support* their daughters. Through the DADs library link, readers may subscribe, at no charge, to *DADs Update*, view back issues, and access educational materials. Site also includes information about publications for parents of daughters. ■