

Men in Families (I'm a Dad Program)

Contact details

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Hours of service: Antenatal Classes – after hours
Antenatal Reunions - Weekends

Project Worker contactable by phone, business hours and evenings

Community workers: Paul Sheehy 0427 928 848
Helen Barrett - Casual

Manager Operations: Tony White **Director:** Linda Mondy

About the program

The Men in Families program commenced in 2000 as a pilot project funded under the Commonwealth Government's Men and Family Relationships Initiative.

The program recognises the important role fathers play in their children's lives and the advantages of increasing both the motivation and skills of men to contribute positively to the wellbeing of their children.

Services are free to fathers who participate in the program.

Eligibility

The service is available to all first-time fathers living in the Coffs Harbour area.

Objectives

- Build upon social support networks established in antenatal classes.
- Positive parenting and relationship skills are developed through group work and cooperative learning.
- A "team" approach to parenting is promoted and supported.
- Increased community awareness of the importance of fathers' active and positive involvement in the lives of their children.
- Improved access for first-time parents to appropriate support services.
- Father-inclusive practices are promoted and supported in local child and family services.

Referrals

From

- Coffs Harbour Primary Health Services and Pregnancy Care
- Family Support Services – Burnside

To

- Burnside Family Worker Fathers
- Interrelate
- GPs
- Burnside family Support and Playgroup
- Child and Family Clinics

Services

Our aim is to provide information and skills while developing social supports to assist fathers in their new role. A team approach to parenting is promoted and supported. Men are encouraged to be actively involved in the care of their baby from the beginning. There is a focus on the importance and benefits of bonding with your baby from day one. Too often men are seen as important when their children can kick a football, need help with their homework or require discipline. The program aims to change these myths and break down gender stereotypes.

The importance of the early days in a child's life and the attachment process between father and child is highlighted and seen as being very important to both father and child. The program encourages men to be part of the holding, caring, bathing, and changing of nappies from the beginning. There is also a strong emphasis on communicating with the infant and being receptive to and recognising the cues that the infant sends out in trying to communicate with the parents. It is this hands-on approach that will set the foundation for a strong relationship with their child.

The importance of positive father involvement with their children is promoted within local services and the Coffs Harbour community. Services are also encouraged to develop father-inclusive practices to improve access for eligible fathers.

A large part of the Men in Families Program works in partnership with the Coffs Harbour Health Campus. The Community Worker co-facilitates antenatal groups with the Mid Wife Nurse Educators. He attends 28 groups per year, having 2 sessions with each group. There are both evening and day groups that focus on the needs of first time parents. He arranges 16 reunion lunches per year which are held on weekends after the birth of all the children in each evening group. Phone contact is used to keep in contact and follow up with the new dads.

All first time fathers are given an antenatal bag on week one of the antenatal groups. This contains a copy of 'First Time Father' by Tony White and Dr Graeme Russell, a copy of the Parentalk newsletter which is published on a quarterly basis and sent to over 500 first-time families in the Coffs Harbour area.

The newsletter aims to support first-time parents with stories from parents and promotes positive parenting and social support. It is produced by the Men in Family team at Coffs Harbour. The bag also contains the I'm a Dad poem and other relevant brochures to assist dads to be.

After the birth of the child the new dads are visited by the worker at maternity and given the 'I'm a Dad' bag which is a calico bag with the I'm a Dad logo. The bag contains a cap with the I'm a Dad logo, a hand made Red Cross bear and lots of literature to assist new dad. There is also a gift for the mum and a book for the new baby.

Approximately six weeks after the last baby is born in the evening groups a reunion luncheon is organised by the worker at Pacific Bay Resort. The luncheon is designed to bring the antenatal group back together and show their babies while discussing their birth experiences. It is also an opportunity to develop and strengthen networks that have been formed through the antenatal and birth period. It gives parents a chance to normalise their experiences and current situation while encouraging new parents build stronger support networks.

A series of posters and a DVD have been produced depicting local fathers and promoting the importance of fathers' positive involvement in the lives of their children.

Funding

100% Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Key facts

Associate Professor Graeme Russell from Macquarie University externally evaluated the program in 2002.

The aim of his study was to evaluate the Men in Families and Families First projects currently operating in the Coffs Harbour Local Government Area. There were two stages for this research.

The first stage involved collection of data for a control group and included participants who had not been exposed to the two projects.

The second stage involved the collection of responses from families who have used services within the scope of the two projects.

Combined, the two research components have enabled a comparative analysis to be made in evaluating the achievements of the projects and the overall impact on family functioning. In his report, Graeme Russell outlined *The Impact of a changed approach to service delivery* – as follows:

“Analyses were conducted to determine if there were any differences between the responses of parents in the two phases of the study on a range of key parenting dimensions. Significant differences were found for several of the variables for fathers, but not for mothers.

Overall, fathers in the second phase of the study were:

- more satisfied with family life – 90% vs 73%
- more likely to indicate that they were extremely satisfied with their relationship with their child – 56% vs 40%
- more satisfied with themselves as parents – 75% vs 63%
- more likely to rate themselves as being competent as parents – 80% vs 55%
- more likely to rate themselves as being confident as parents – 88% vs 63%
- more likely to indicate that they understood their child – 83% vs 70%.

“It is difficult to tie these changes directly to specific aspects of the intervention, however, it can be reasonably concluded that they are linked to the key changes that occurred in service delivery, particularly antenatal classes, home visiting and the emphasis given to fathers through the initiatives of the Men in Families project in affirming and celebrating the role of fathers (both through the I’m a Dad initiative and the continual engagement of fathers in service delivery).”
(Page 66 Evaluation Report)

The full Evaluation Report is available for viewing on the Burnside website at www.burnside.org.au.

Service user perspective:

Speech by Tony Fox at Mentor Graduation Ceremony

I first became aware of the “Men in Families” program when my wife and I took part in antenatal classes with our first pregnancy over three years ago. Tony White spoke at the classes and it was at this time that I really started to become aware of the challenges of the role and responsibilities of fatherhood. I saw Tony again at the hospital when Bremen was born and he presented me with my “I’m a dad” bag. I was absolutely stoked. Someone did care about dads and was prepared to support and nurture my role as a father. Tony then asked me to say a few words at the launch of the program and these words have now been immortalised on the “I’m a dad” DVD.

This was really the beginning of my journey.

Tony then asked me if I would like to take part in delivering dad bags to dads at the hospital. Of course I said yes. I was in fact humbled and felt privileged that he would ask me to do this. I have now been delivering bags to the hospital for

about two years and in that time, met around 600 families. I feel very fortunate and am constantly amazed to be involved with people at such an important time in their lives.

I now co-facilitate antenatal classes at the hospital and endeavour to perpetuate the basic message of the program - dads are important.

I have also been very lucky to be involved with the "Dads as Mentors" program auspiced by Burnside and supported by TAFE outreach. I guess that you could say that it was at this time that I really began to grow as a dad. I went from being a dad to being part of a group of dads. What is the collective noun for a bunch of dads? A pride? The experience of the mentors program has been one of the highlights of my dad experience.

Becoming a parent has taught me many things but being able to share experiences, learn new skills and talk to other dads about dad stuff has made me a more confident, caring and sharing father. I would like to say thanks to all the other dads and to Dave Curley for their involvement.

One of the difficulties that I think we had was the fact that we had almost too many ideas and too much energy. I remarked to my wife after one of the classes that, as a group, I didn't think that there was a problem or challenge that we could not overcome. The mentors course whet my appetite for study and at the beginning of this year, I enrolled part-time in TAFE doing a community welfare course and am happy to say that I now work for Burnside in the "Men in Families" program.

I think that the Mentors course has provided all of us with a better understanding of our role as dads. This has had definite benefits for my wife, my family, my community and me.

Thank you.

Tony Fox