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**Evaluation of the Dads Group at
Blacon Children's Centre**

Executive Summary

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April 2008

Executive Summary

Introduction

Sure Start Blacon was established in 2002 under the lead of the National Children's Home. In September 2006, in line with developments in government strategy regarding the delivery of early years services, Sure Start Blacon was re-structured to become Blacon Children's Centre under the lead of Cheshire County Council. Its inclusion in Phase 1 of the rolling-out of the Children's Centre model in Cheshire reflected Blacon Sure Start's demographic profile as being amongst the 20% of Sure Start programmes located in the most disadvantaged communities.

In 2006, Sure Start Blacon set up a drop-in session aimed at male carers with children under eight years of age. The session, called the 'Dads Group', has continued running through the transition of the Sure Start programme to Blacon Children's Centre, and aims to provide an informal arena where information, advice and support can be shared whilst participation in other Children's Centre services can be promoted and encouraged.

Study design and methodology

This was an exploratory study designed to evaluate Blacon Children's Centre Dads Group. A mixed method approach was used, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods were used to establish level of service usage by sex for all services provided by Blacon Children's Centre. Qualitative methods included observation of the Dads Group, a focus group with Dads Group users, interviews with staff facilitating the group and a face-to-face questionnaire with Dads who do not attend the Dads Group.

Findings and conclusions

Through combining the findings from the various sources, some key issues have been identified, as well as areas for development. Nearly all of the dads who were attending the Dads Group, along with all of the regular service providers, participated in this study, and thus the findings should accurately reflect perceptions of the service. The main limitations of the study were the low number of non-service users who participated and the limited availability of service activity data from the E-start database.

Women's increasing representation in the paid labour market and the impact of changes in family patterns have led to a rise in the prominence of 'fatherhood'. Therefore, there is arguably a need for parenting and childcare services targeting male service users. The Dads Group at Blacon Children's Centre offers an opportunity for dads to access Children's Centre services. It offers a well resourced and quality environment in which dads/male carers and their children can interact, without any financial cost to the families who participate. At the time of this evaluation, a wide range of activities and experiences were available to both children and their dads/carers and it was evident that the Dads Group was achieving its service delivery aims and objectives. The Dads Group service was highly valued by both staff at the Children's Centre and those dads/carers who access the service.

The dads who participated in the group appeared to have an insight into their parenting and how the group was able to support them through offering facilities and support to help them develop their relationship with their children. However, the ability to engage with dads is a major issue, as highlighted by both Children's Centre staff and those dads who access the service. Currently, only a very small number of the eligible population access the Dads Group or indeed the Children's Centre. Whilst it is recognised that the service may not be accessible to all dads due to the timing of the session, steps have been made to introduce a session during the week in the hope that more dads will use the service. Ultimately, the Dads Group provides shared and enjoyable experiences between dads/carers and their child/children.