

Men's and Fathers' Family Friendly Policy Forum

20th June 2007
Parliament House, Canberra

Welcome from the Fatherhood Foundation



We welcome you as a delegate, or parliamentarian, to the Men's /Fathers' Family Friendly Policy Forum. Your presence here today is open testimony to the need to turn the tide of fatherlessness in Australia.

Our challenge today will be for us to be very open and honest with each other, to hear not only each other's words but also each other's hearts. The 12pt Plan and National Strategic Conference on Fatherhood (August 2003) were born out of the ability to listen and walk in one another's shoes, to show honour and respect for one another.

These are the keys to the positive outcomes we wish to achieve for the mothers, fathers and children of our nation. The 12pt Plan was launched in a true bipartisan fashion when a prominent politician said, "We don't want a men's movement that blames women, we want a men's movement that works with men and women to develop better identity, better relationships, a stronger fathering role in our society and to develop win-win outcomes, where as a society across both genders, we can make advances and make successful change."

The Fatherhood Foundation is a Harm Prevention Charity. Fatherlessness is a source of harm to children and families that carries a significant cost. Dr Bruce Robinson estimates the cost of fatherlessness to Australia to be in the vicinity of 13 billion dollars per year.

The goal of the Fatherhood Foundation is to promote excellence in fathering and increase the number of children growing up with an involved, committed, responsible and loving father.

For this reason the Fatherhood Foundation is a strong supporter of marriage and the importance of increased pre-marriage education and marriage counselling. It is easier, and more sensible, to build a

rail around the top of the cliff to prevent people falling over, than it is to run an ambulance service for those who fall to the bottom of the cliff. Placing a rail around the top of the cliff is a win-win scenario for mothers, fathers and especially the children.

We appreciate the sacrifices made in coming to this forum; we all lead very busy lives. We look forward to your contribution to the restoration of fatherhood in Australia. For those of you who are reading this policy document for the first time we hope you find it inspiring. We encourage you to do what can to change your world.

The Fatherhood Foundation is not a lobby group. If you wish to be part of the campaign to advance the policies found in this document we suggest you share this document with your local member of Parliament or contact James Adams of Fathers4Families.org.au, whose contact details are on the next page.

Thanks & appreciation

Warwick and Alison Marsh and the Fatherhood Foundation team would like to thank James Adams from Fathers4Families for helping co-ordinate the forum. We would also like to acknowledge the help received from Richard Bosi, Richard Hillman Foundation, Greg Andresen, Dads on the Air, Wanda Taylor and all our other friends and helpers. The delegates and keynote speakers to the Forum and Forum Policy document who attended from all over Australia.

Yours for positive change
Warwick & Alison Marsh
www.fatherhood.org.au



The Way Forward



I ask you to join our campaign for families, for fatherhood, families and fairness.

The Fatherhood and Families Movement

This Canberra forum was attended by the leaders of 35 groups of the Fatherhood and Families Movement. We met with, *well*, pretty-much everybody in politics!

This is THE MOST POWERFUL group of government officials who has ever listened to us!

What this means is that WE ARE NOW A POLITICAL FORCE! We are organised enough to win votes. With a very close Federal election coming up, they will need our votes.

Today there are so many problems. For example:

- Our sons are mistreated in schools, so that now boys have an average mark that is 20% beneath their sisters.
- 80% of suicides are male.
- For every \$200 spent on women's health programs, a mere \$1 is spent on men's.
- The Family Court forces kids into sole custody in 97.5% of cases
- Girls who don't grow up with their natural fathers are 5 times more likely to get pregnant as teenagers (after controlling for class and race)

Children who were denied BOTH their natural parents suffer. They represent:

- 63% of youth suicides
- 70% of juveniles in State Institutions
- 71% of High School dropouts
- 75% of children in drug abuse centres
- 85% of children with behavioural problems
- 87% of juvenile offenders.
- 90% of homeless and runaway children

How our kids suffer! The simple solution is to stop removing good parents from children's lives. To encourage marriage and support our men and boys.

Citations available on
www.fathersunite.org/statistics_on_fatherlessness

In this Forum we discussed the campaigns and actions between now and the Federal election... The key five issues that need urgent action are:

1. Putting children first in divorce law and Child Support
2. Boys education
3. A child's right to both their natural parents (medical paternity testing at birth)
4. Men's health and suicide
5. Supporting fatherhood and marriage

We are a movement for equality... we are not "Angry Men's Rights Activists". We are parents who love our children and want the country to support families and fairness. Around a third of our movement is women!

Every year, many thousands of children are permanently damaged by having a parent stolen from them. It's a new Stolen Generation. Also thousands of men commit suicide.

We will win this. We will change the World. But when? How many young lives will be destroyed before the problems are fixed? How many men will suicide? How many people will die from easily preventable causes? How many young women won't manage to have the families they desperately want due to the Marriage Strike?

Fathers4Families.com.au

Fathers4Families is a group of activists who are fighting to fix things.

I'm a single dad. But my beautiful 3YO daughter is one of the few lucky ones. She has BOTH her parents, almost 50-50. We share! We both work a 4-day week so my daughter gets to have dress-ups with mum, and Hide-and-Seek with Dad.

James ADAMS
Campaign Manager 0417 258 364
PartTimeParent@POBox.com

**A Parent's Love
Is The Greatest Love Of All**

Parliamentarians who attended

**Here is a list of the politicians who attended our Forum
Please write to them and thank them for listening!**

Labor Party

Jennie George MP
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Senator Barnaby Joyce
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Family First

Senator Steve Fielding
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Delegates Creed



1. *Blame not, judge not, and make no assumptions*
2. *Listen intently and carefully. Look from the listener's perspective*
3. *Identify the kernel of truth in every argument, especially those you totally oppose*
4. *Treat everyone with honour, respect, dignity and sensitivity*
5. *Always relate to the big picture ie restoration of Fatherhood in Australia*
6. *Let the past be a reference, not a pivot for the future*
7. *Look for common principles*
8. *Put differences in context*
9. *Deal with issues, not personalities*
10. *Pursue unity with diversity*

Speaker Order & Subjects

Breakout Group 1: Chair - Warwick Marsh. Assistant Chair - Greg Andresen.
Subjects: Education, Health, Family & Community, Birthrate/Demographics (Treasury), General Issues concerning boys, men, fathers & grandfathers, all in the context of families.

1. Maggie Hamilton - Boys, Men, Fathers & Grandfathers
Author: 'What Men Don't Talk About' Sydney, NSW

2. Judi Geggie - Boys Education, Mentoring & the Way Forward
Director: Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, NSW

3. Professor John McDonald - Men's Health and Suicide
Foundation Chair in Primary Health Care, Co-Director Men's Health Information and Resource Centre, University of Western Sydney, NSW

4. Greg Andresen - Demographics, Birthrate, Fathers in Families, the marginalisation of men and the need for change
Research Officer: 'Dads on the Air' radio programme, Liverpool, NSW

Breakout Group 2: Chairman - Richard Bosi. Assistant Chair - James Adams.
Subjects: Fathers and the Law, Family Law, Attorney General Department, Child Support, Human Services and related issues.

1. Natalie Gately & Dr Pamela Henry - Family Law, Child Support, Social Policy and the way forward. Total Time: 6 minutes
Dr Pamela Henry: Senior Lecturer/Coordinator Criminology & Justice, and
Natalie Gately: Lecturer & DUMA WA Site Manager, School of Law & Justice
Edith Cowan University, Perth, WA

2. Wayne Butler - Family Law Reform and the ongoing need for further change
Executive Secretary: Shared Parenting Council, Central Coast, NSW

3. Dr Robert Kelso - Family Law and the Public Purse
Senior Lecturer: School of Management, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton, QLD

4. James Adams - Advantages for Women and Families in Family Law Reform
Coordinator: Fathers4Families, Sydney, NSW

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| <i>The National Fathering Forum has formulated a Twelve Point Plan to strengthen and support fatherhood and turn the tide of fatherlessness in Australia. This is divided into 3 major categories:</i> | 36 |
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Fatherhood and Families Forum

Breakout 1: Supporting fathers and families

Key Findings From *What Men Don't Talk About*

When fathers are engaged, informed and valued everyone benefits – their children, their partners, the workplace, their community, their nation.

The way forward – education and engagement, through a range of resources.

Developmental Importance of Fathers

Most people have no idea how essential fathers are to the development of their children. Eminent child psychiatrist Dr Kyle Pruett, for example, says fathers have a major role to play in building a baby's brainpower, and assisting their children develop good social interactions.

Short-term solution – produce a booklet for fathers attending pre-natal classes that details the very real positive impact they can have on their baby's developmental skills.

Emotional Education of Boys

Leading professionals who work with severely at risk boys, including Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson, co-authors of *Raising Cane*, point to the importance of boys being emotionally literate. The most violent boys are the most emotionally shut down. Giving boys permission to develop an emotional repertoire enables them to handle themselves better, be confident, and stay out of trouble by dealing positively with difficult situations. Fathers have an essential role in teaching boys an emotional repertoire, but first they need to know how important this is, and how they can help.

Suggested first steps

Fund an accessible book for boys and their dads, written by a recognisable and trusted figure, such as Steve Biddulph author of *Raising Boys*.

- fund a community training module for fathers that could be promoted and perhaps run through P & C organizations, Rotary etc, that assist and encourage fathers to parent their boys.

Supporting the Role of Fathers

Newer fathers are far more engaged with their children than their fathers and grandfathers. They are doing this with little or no assistance. The more engaged fathers are, the more mothers are

supported. They need easy-to-access material to help them fulfil this vital task.

Suggested solution

Set up a National Information on Fatherhood Centre. In the UK, for example, there's the government funded charity **Father's Direct** – which provides news, training information, policy updates, research summaries and guides to support fathers and their families, covering everything from maternity services, schools and learning, young fathers, separated fathers, the workplace, parenting education, domestic violence, child protection to drugs and alcohol. See - <http://www.fathersdirect.com>

Older Men

One of the most shocking aspects of the research for my book *What Men Don't Talk About* was my interviews with retired men of all backgrounds. Many confessed they wished they were dead, or felt they were dead. These men ache to be of value to their communities – they have a lifetime of experience. We need to find ways to engage them in the community - and especially with boys, many of whom are lacking good male role models, people who have the time to listen, to mentor.

One short-term solution – many of our boys have difficulties around reading. Training retired men to assist boys to learn to read within the school system as teacher's aids, using books that appeal to boys.

Published June 2006 by Penguin Australia, Maggie Hamilton's latest book *What Men Don't Talk About*, is the result of two years' research into the lives of Australian men and boys.

The book is now available in Australia and New Zealand, on CD, and about to be published in Holland, Brazil and by an Arabic publisher.

contact@maggiehamilton.org

About Maggie Hamilton

Writer and publisher Maggie Hamilton's working life has encompassed the public and private sectors, and includes senior roles in book publishing at Random House, Allen & Unwin, and with the ABC. Maggie gives regular talks, lectures and workshops; writes for magazines; and is a keen observer of social trends.

A sustainable society where children flourish

Policies on Fathers - Making sure that services include fathers

Recent amendments to the Family Law Act and the associated establishment of new family relationship services mark a fundamental shift in the approach to family dissolution. Fathers are now recognised as important influence on children's well being. However the services which surround families remain caught in outmoded practices which exclude fathers which impacts negatively on the family.

Schools, Early Childhood Centres, Hospitals, Health Services and Community programs unintentionally fail to include fathers in their day-to-day operations.

A national approach to develop baseline data on father involvement, and to co-ordinate the development of policies, programs and procedures to include fathers is essential.

Example: Around Australia ad hoc and temporary programs are being conducted to provide education and support to new fathers. A national approach (through COAG for example) could put these initiatives on a professional basis with coherent aims and curricula.

For information on fathers go to www.newcastle.edu.au/includingfathers

Policies on Boys' Education

It is clear from the body of documented research and practice in educating boys that certain initiatives are most likely to have positive impacts on outcomes for boys. As well, there are some neglected areas that it is important to research. We suggest that any government would be wise to build on and fund programs in the following areas:

1. Early literacy programs and interventions for boys including early assessment of auditory and verbal skills and the ongoing use of ITC in school programs.

2. Support for and reward of individual excellent teachers of boys.

3. Funding for school programs that link academic and welfare aspects together to achieve engagement of boys.

4. Funding of school programs to enhance community involvement, particularly of fathers.

5. Professional development programs for teachers.

6. Long term funding for research programs.

7. Funding new research into positive impacts of gender on boys' outcomes.

For information on educating boys go to www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/boysinschools

Men's Health

The poor state of men's health and health services for them.

In an excellent Position Paper on men's health, the AMA in 2005, tells us "on many outcome measures men appear to do significantly poorer than their female counterparts. These outcomes include lower life expectancy, increased cardiovascular mortality, increased rates of injury, poisoning and suicide" (1)

Why no National Men's Health Policy?

It is a national shame that we have a National Women's Health Policy but not a National Men's Health Policy. We need political leadership in this, to construct a policy based on health needs. We have a wonderful national longitudinal study on women's health on which rational health policies for women can be based. Why is there no funding for a national longitudinal men's health study?

A positive approach to men's health issues

Generally interest in men's and boys' health generally confines itself to certain conditions like prostate problems or social pathologies (e.g. violence) and questions as to why they don't visit the doctor more often. Unless we move away from negative thinking about men we will not construct supportive policies for men's and boys' health. In population health internationally there is a move to adopt a social determinants of health framework (taking into account the social, economic and cultural context of health, including issues such as stress, job insecurity). Encouraging men's role as fathers is crucial to our national health agenda and fits well within a social determinants approach to men's health. The focus of national policy must be on supporting men and making health services more male-friendly. Male-specific cancers are as common and as dangerous

as female-specific cancers. Health services encourage women to use screening services, why not send out reminders for men to come for check ups in the way they do for women?

Conclusion

A National Men's Health Policy based on funded research into male health needs is what is called for. As I said in an article last year in the Medical Journal of Australia (2).

A "social determinants of health" approach to men's health would help Australia and Australian medical practitioners move away from policies and practices that perpetuate negative views of men and ignore the complexity of their health problems. The result would be a more evidence-based approach...and hopefully influence the formulation of a long-awaited national men's health policy

References

1. Australian Medical Association, 2005, Men's Health Position Statement.
<http://www.ama.com.au/web.nsf/doc/WEEN-6B56JJ>
2. John J Macdonald, Shifting paradigms: a social-determinants approach to solving problems in men's health policy and practice, MJA 2006; 185 (8): 456-458
<http://www.ama.com.au/web.nsf/doc/WEEN-6B56JJ>

Men's Health: Perspective of Professor John Macdonald, Professor of Primary Health Care, UWS, President Australasian Men's Health Forum and Co-Director, Men's Health Information and Resource Centre, UWS

Men and boys

Little representation, policy, research or advocacy for males on gender issues

No government departments dedicated to male issues

No men's policies (health, education or otherwise) from government

Schools and universities teach only women's studies and feminist perspectives

Gender research biased towards women - little research from male perspectives

Little resourcing for support and information (social, legal, health) for males

Solutions

A federal department for men to oversee and co-ordinate a range of policy initiatives for men, and commission male-positive gender research through universities.

Male health and wellbeing

High mortality and morbidity rates (overall & from all top ten causes of death)

Low life expectancy

High suicide rates (esp. among divorced men)

High rates of work-related injuries, illness & death

Lack of "male friendly" health services

Lack of paternity leave and family provisions for men in the workplace

High rates of violence against men and boys (assault, homicide, domestic & sexual violence)

Solutions

A federally funded men's health policy; a longitudinal study on men's health; expanding and making all family workplace provisions gender-neutral (e.g. parental leave); expanding anti-violence programs, domestic violence services and sexual assault services to include male victims

Boys' education

Low literacy scores, low year 12 scores (boys average mark is 20% below girls)

Boys' poor school engagement and retention rates

Low rate of male tertiary graduates

Lack of male teachers, especially in early childhood and primary education

Solutions

A gender review of Australia's education system to ensure it is tailored to the needs and learning styles of both boys and girls; scholarships for male teachers and early childhood workers; training for teachers to learn boy-friendly teaching methods.

Children's well-being

Physical and psychological damage to children who grow up without their natural fathers

Living with "mum's new boyfriend" dramatically increases the risk of child abuse

Lifelong damage to people who, as children, miss out on the involvement of one of their parents

Solutions

Reverse financial and administrative incentives encouraging family break-up; public education campaign promoting fatherhood; interim protective orders issued in local courts ensuring that children have equal overnights with both parents at separation, until the divorce is finalised.

Bias against males within the legal system

Anti-male bias within family courts and the legal and associated professions

False accusations of sexual and domestic violence

Inequitable child support system

Little enforcement of court orders for children to see their fathers and paternal relatives

Solutions

Education programs for the legal and associated professions to counter anti-male bias; review of the child support system; government compliance with recommendations of the Australian Law Reform Commission's report *Managing Justice: A review of the federal civil justice system*; external review of the Family Court conducted by international forensic auditors with no connection to the family law industry, including a public investigation of the conduct of family report writers used by the court.

Our son struggles at school...

Our future belongs to our kids. But some kids have been left behind. Our boys' chances in life have been devastated due to the low marks they now are given at school.

Boys used to achieve slighter better marks on average than girls, but not now. Now the difference is a whopping 20%^{1 2}

20% is the difference between getting into the best courses at the best universities, and barely scraping into the least popular courses in a regional University.

20% is the difference between getting into Medicine at Sydney Uni and Basket-weaving at Wagga Wagga.

My son's smart, but he's not motivated

Even smart boys are being failed now. Over the last 15 years most of the changes in schools have made school more fun and motivating for girls, but boring for boys.

Boys and girls have different passions, energies, focus and drives. The fun stuff has been increased for girls, but it's been reduced for boys. You can't train dogs using carrots. It is no co-incidence that 80% of ADHD sufferers now are boys.

Why are schools failing boys?

Boys always used to do slightly better at school than girls, but was reversed in the 1980's.

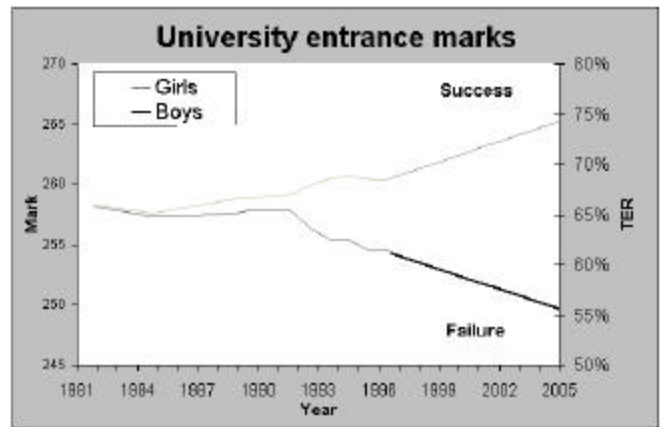
Boys haven't suddenly become stupid. Our schools changed. Virtually every new educational fad and curriculum change disadvantages boys. For example:

- Too few male teachers. 250 primary schools in NSW don't have even one male teacher.³ (Added to this, many kids have lost their dad through divorce)

¹ Graph to 1996 is from NSW. Published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics "Australian Social Trends" 1998 Gender differences in educational achievement page 81. CATALOGUE NO. 41 02.0. After 1996 the graph is extrapolated to a 19% difference in 2005, quoted in citation 2. According to a FOI request, the relevant NSW department suspiciously "does not have access to this data".

² Sex Discrimination Commissioner Pru Goward http://www.hreoc.gov.au/speeches/sex_discrim/rotary20060215.html

³ 250 Public primary schools in NSW have no male teaching staff. Mal Brough, Minister for Families.



- Continuous assessment and fewer exams (*Girls are more diligent, while the excitement of exams suits boys*)
- 'Dumbing down' science and maths (*adding essays to physics advantages girls, and reduces the time available to teach real physics*)
- Highly verbal 'communicative' teaching techniques (*girls like talking, boys prefer doing*)
- Whole language instead of phonics (*Whole language favours girls*)
- Adding verbal components to sciences (*because girls like talking*). But leaving English and the humanities without the factual content and narrative structure which boys enjoy.
- Reducing practical content, such as science labs.
- Outcomes based education that reward process instead of content (*boys can grasp facts better than subjective processes*).
- Undermining discipline (*boys thrive in a more structured school*).

You can't train dogs with carrots

Our teachers are doing the best they can, but their training is biased. Teacher training needs equal boys' and girls' sections for every school subject.

The feminisation of our schools is so deep that every level of education needs explicit boys education areas.

Our kids need:

- A national body to impose educational frameworks and curricula based on research.
- A voucher system so parents are not financially penalised if they choose a single-sex school.
- Roll-out of successful "Lighthouse Schools" projects.
- A partial segregation of classes by gender.
- Action on the various proposals to encourage men to become teachers.

James ADAMS www.Fathers4Families.com.au

A vision for fathers, for mothers and especially our children

Children with actively involved fathers are five times less likely to be victims of child abuse. At present we have over half of marriages ending in divorce and rising. This has a massive impact on our children. One third of separated fathers do not have contact with their children after seven years. These fathers are thirteen times more likely to commit suicide than their partners. The cost to our community in substance abuse and loss of productivity in the workplace is enormous.

The Fatherhood Project works with first time fathers to skill them up. They gain confidence for the job, greater knowledge and stronger relationship skills to cope with the changes in their relationship.

We educate service providers through workshops and events on father friendly practice. We also run an annual public event-The Fatherhood Festival to create public awareness of the role of fathers. The Festival attracts ten thousand families, mothers, fathers, grandparents and children. We have a database that is increasing daily.

We would like to see additions to policy in line with the UK model below.

Aiming high for children: supporting families (HM Treasury, 2007, which defines the terms of reference for money given to DfES for the next three years) specifically mentions:

- New funding for work with fathers in Children's Centres – e.g. outreach workers, parenting classes that work for fathers
- A focus on midwives and health visitors and their role in supporting *both* parents
- A Parents Charter that will define the responsibilities of services to mothers *and fathers* (explicitly)
- A specific critique of the word “parent” and how it excludes fathers.
- A new focus on the need to engage with separated fathers – with reference to caring and learning, rather than just financial support.
- A strong critique of how fathers are excluded from family services - and promotion of a strategic plan to address this.

We look forward to working with you to make this happen.

Colin George

Imagine, in ten years from now and the expectant fathers programmes have been running in your community. There is a festival on Father's day to celebrate the role. Imagine the kind of positive outcomes first for our children, on the mothers who will be with confident fathers and team players and finally the kind of positive outcomes in our community.

What we do

Our activities include:

Producing the world's first Fatherhood Festival, hosted by Andrew Denton.

This three day, sell out event is about raising the flag for Fathers, sharing stories, questioning the role and celebrating fathers of all ages. This year, (our fourth) we expect more than 10,000 families to attend. We see festivals in every community around Australia.

(www.fatherhoodfestival.com)

Creating mentoring programs for expectant fathers. 'Boot camps' for dads where the men get skilled up and confident and get to talk about changes in sex and romance, baby care, finances and the big issues for fathers in a fun yet safe environment. (www.fatherhood.com.au)

Creating awareness raising products that inspire and motivate people to think about the great things that fathers offer. Products already promoted are the Fatherhood CD with John Butler, Paul Kelly and Archie Roach and the Michael Leunig T-Shirt. Products in process include The Fatherhood Festival, Music DVD with Pete Murray and many more.

(www.fatherhood-cd.org)

All of this takes time, hard work and financial support. I invite you to contribute courageously by making your donation meaningful to you.

Thankyou from

Colin George -Director

Men in crisis

Mensline Australia is the national telephone counselling, information and referral service for men with family and relationship concerns. Operating 24/7 it answers approximately 3,500 calls per month from men with a variety of family and relationship concerns. Of the male callers to the service 70% are fathers.

Mensline Australia recognises and endorses that

1. The importance of fathers in the life of children. Fathers play a significant role in all developmental stages of a child's life.
2. Men and fathers are undergoing an important redefinition of their role as fathers, husbands and providers. Supporting men in managing the potential conflicts that arise in trying to meet the expectations of these changing job descriptions should be central to future policy and program development.
3. Current social discourse about men and fathers is often negative and detrimental. Mensline Australia endorses a non-deficit model of working with men as fathers.
4. Resources are required to assist and support men and fathers in this process of redefinition and to assist them to engage and remain engaged with their children – this applies to fathers in intact families and those have separated from their children.
5. The needs of men and fathers are to be address at all levels – individual, social and organisational. There is a danger of contributing to the pathologising of men as poor help seekers by not recognising and addressing the environmental and social barriers that prevent men's access to services. Initiatives that encourage services, organisations and business to be more men and father inclusive are to be encouraged.
6. Any work with men and fathers is to be conducted within a context of recognising and supporting the real benefits to be had for children and women, as well as for men themselves – these benefits are health, social and economic. Work with fathers must embrace a child-focus approach.
7. Further research is required to examine the social benefits of work-life balance for men and fathers as well as the health and social consequences FOR Australian men and fathers working longer hours and the increasing burden of debt on families as a result of economic / political decisions.
8. Greater collaboration and coordination is required and necessary across the broad cross section of men's services generally. This will involve the establishment of an administrative structure to support the dissemination of information, consistency in communication on men's issues, research and policy development and an agreed point of intersection between government and the sector.

Partnering and pornography

In the lead up to the 2007 federal election, the Australian Family Association (AFA) wishes the leadership of all political parties to consider the following issues when making policy decisions.

These are issues which the AFA believes particularly impact on men's / father's ability to form lasting relationships and provide a stable home – essential ingredients for strong family life.

'MEN AND WOMEN APART – Partnering in Australia' – by Bob Birrell

Alarming, the key finding of this study, based on the 1988, 1996 and 2001 census, shows that despite the appearances of prosperity, a growing underclass of single low income males (SLIMS), not in full-time work and lacking the economic resources to hold a family together, is the major reason for the decline in the marriage and fertility rate since the mid-1980's.

The study shows that SLIMS are typically not in full-time work, lack post-school education and are living on less than \$31,200 p.a. (with many on less than \$15,600 p.a.). They are losing out in the marriage market due to the lack of full-time jobs (*full-time work being strongly indicated as a positive condition for marriage*).

The study traces the fall in full-time employment levels for young men since 1986. It shows that by 2001, one-third of men aged 25-29 were not in full-time work, and 28-29% of those aged 30-34 were also not in full-time work; more than half of all men in their late 20's and early 30's had no post-school qualifications.

A summary table demonstrates that the lower the income, the lower the marriage and partnering rate, and the higher the divorce and separation rate.

It would seem reasonable to conclude that SLIMS have little prospect of finding the sort of happiness that many of us take for granted – a loving marriage, children, and a place they can call their own.

To reverse these trends, the AFA calls on the government to expand the education and training opportunities of apprentices and skilled workers, and to increase the number of university places to keep pace with the demand for professional services, rather than importing skilled and professional workers.

The AFA also calls on the government to boost infrastructure and growth industries which can provide full-time employment for those without post-school education.

This study is available from: The National Secretary, Australian Family Association (address above). A summary is also available upon request.

Impact Of Pornography On Men And Their Families

In August 2005, around 80 people representing a wide cross-section of groups from around Australia, came together with the aim of “promoting quality relationships between men and women for the purpose of ending the sexual exploitation of men, women and children in the 21st century.”

The keynote speaker, Dr Maryann Layden (a psychotherapist from the USA, who specializes in treating porn addiction) raised the alarm bells about the escalating destruction of men's relationships with women and children brought about by the easy access to online porn and subsequent slide into sexual addiction. The use of pornography places a sword through the centre of what is most intimate and precious in a marriage. It results in feelings of shame, anxiety and depression. It causes impotence and hardens the male heart towards women, and is a major factor in cases of sexual violence and sexual crime.

Keen to address these and other concerns, the Integrity Alliance was formed and put together a 10 point Sexual Integrity Policy Plan (available upon request).

At the time, the Integrity Alliance, and the Australian Family Association, with the backing of tens of thousands of Australians, called on the federal government to introduce mandatory filtering of internet pornography at ISP level. In November 2005, 62 Government back-benchers signed a letter to the Prime Minister supporting this plan.

It is our belief that there exists the technology to tackle this issue at the ISP level. PC filters are only effective on the PC's that have them, and they do nothing to screen pornography from mobile phones. ISP filtering would provide the only effective safeguard against accidental access to pornography. *The AFA renews its call for mandatory filtering of pornography at ISP level.*

Mary-Louise Fowler (National Vice-President)

Survival Strategies to Counteract Suicide

Out of respect to your e-mail clutter, we offer this brief paper. A more detailed paper of 3 pages available to any on request.

This material is presented by the "The ARC Centre". We are not speaking on behalf of the Suicide Safety Network.

Survival

Although the Nation and individuals have contributed multi millions of dollars and an enormous amount of energy and professional skills, the suicide rate in Australia remains disturbingly high. No demographic is excluded, however men make up over 80% of total recorded deaths by suicide. Read this paper accordingly.

Many circumstances play a significant role in suicidal ideation and behaviour.

Events such as:-

- Loss of employment.
- Death of a family member or close friend.
- Physical incapacity.

Unfortunately any lay person can name many more.

Counteracting (action required)

The following starting points requiring further action and possibly change are:

community awareness education.

On this point failure by boys to achieve the HSC is a notable contribution to suicide.

Client friendly government and non government agency interview environment s. .

Organisations such as Chamber of Commerce and Industry, business management, trade unions, and all identities employing staff be upskilled in detecting likely suicidal thinking and behaviour and having available to them appropriate referral information.

An improved referral system between Gov. and NGA"s to ensure that patients or clients do not fall between the cracks caused by an overworked and underfunded system of client care.

There is a need for a review of confidentiality laws.

Family Law needs to become sensitive to the bigger picture.

Strategies and Funding

The two go hand in hand.

Whilst the noisiest wheel gets the most oil (especially if that wheel can win votes) the noise from the competing wheels from other walks of life, is growing faster than the economic pie is. So those holding the oil can, must become increasingly deaf in order to survive.

This very conference shows the abundance of passion in our world that is teaming with talent and dedication towards a positive desire to help Australia's system of community improve on a job that, given its many short comings, is not dreamt of in most of the world.

Whilst we implore the public system to come to our aid with dollars we must focus on what is to be collectively achieved.

Collective achievement starts with defining the collective.

Are we truly networking?

Of course this is already well underway thru this forum via its 12 step plan but are we happy with changes achieved so far?

To what degree has the 12 step plan, "birthed" at 2003 Forum, been accepted by all contributing agencies?

With respect to funding, have we as contributors to the plan, made particular request for funding to support this plan?

To what extent have our agencies adjusted their agenda to incorporate the plan, particularly its recommendations?

The point is, the more in unison we become the more effective we will be, and thus the more attractive to the keepers of the public purse.

It is not our wish to be accusatory on this. These questions are asked in order to help our agency see where this forum is at and at the same time, generate positive discussion.

Hope we hear from you.

E Trezise, D Blakeway

Work place and cultural reform

Work place reforms

We see the need for the work place and the work environment to be reformed.

Policy discussions regarding work place reforms related to the national skill shortage have been emphasising the need for improved education.

Whilst we see education as very important, we also have identified the need for coaching and mentoring in the work place for men.

The primary ingredient for men to succeed in the work place is their value, and to have their values acknowledged. If men feel valued, this in turn can empower them to be motivated and to become more teachable.

The work place for many men is often the only place where they feel a sense of achievement, though they feel inadequate as husbands, fathers and sons. The fact that this is true means the work place is an ideal environment to encourage them as husbands, fathers, sons, mentors, coaches.

A way we see this model working is to provide coaching and mentoring through a number of channels - from employer to employee, tradesman to trainee/apprentice, work mate to work mate, and providing education within the work place or training facility such as TAFE. Also retirees could be trained as facilitators and they in turn will feel a sense of value, therefore providing a archetypical (model)

Cultural/community reforms

We see the need regarding men's rightful place in the community/church to be reformed.

Men have a story to tell, but are reluctant to share it. This reluctance comes from cultural mindsets, 'she'll be right mate!' as one well recognised example.

Community centres/churches around the country are active when it comes to women's and children's activities, such as mothers groups, craft groups, kids clubs, etc. We see an opportunity to provide safe environments in community/churches and the like for men to be able to tell their story, to be encouraged as husbands and fathers therefore providing early intervention to change habitual cycles.

Past mistakes and reforms/ policies have helped to contribute to our current cultural/societal mindsets, and as a result, tragically, many sons in our nation are without their fathers.

Some of the issues relating to sons without fathers: a feeling of separation, no one to confide in, workaholics, wounds just under the surface, depression, to name a few.

Our culture should be about the boy becoming a man and being empowered to play an active role in our community/churches as mentors, coaches and educators.

A survey with specific questions to the community/church men could help to evaluate their needs.

Philip Harback & Phil Francis
Directions Tas
Tasmanian men's network

Transform men and their families

MTM Australia would like to see government commitment to and implementation of key strategic issues developed at the 2003 National Strategic Conference on Fatherhood.

In particular:

Point 7 –Funding for Fatherhood Services-

National centre for information exchange for fatherhood services, programs and resources

Point10 – Tax Deductibility for Fatherhood Support Groups

Present Tax criteria for PBI and DGR status disqualifies many support organisations from gaining essential tax deductible gifts and donations.

Points 1+2+5+9 - Mentoring for Men and Boys, Transitions, Marriage and Relationship Training.

To resource, develop and improve national mentoring, transition, marriage and relationship programs to assist schools and local community support organisations.

Point 11- Increased number of Male Teachers

Target - 40% male teachers in government schools by 2010.

In addition to the above points:-

There is an urgent need to find alternative low cost housing for the marginalised in society.

Repatriation of many mentally ill in the prisons back into the community. Over 50% of present prison population have mental illness and should not be in prisons. There is a chronic lack of community facilities to assist these families with debilitating mental illnesses.

MTM Australia is a not for profit charitable institution that operates from its community centre in Taringa, Queensland.

MTM's purpose is to "Transform men and their families".

MTM provides direct assistance to men and their families by providing the following community services:

- Counselling, personal and marriage
- Mentorship , groups, camps and seminars
- A training school for men
- Men's Rites of Passage Transition training
- Prison programs and course delivery
- Promotion and prevention of Men's and family issues.
- MTM receives no government grants or funding and is financed and supported by local community groups, individuals and corporate sponsorship.

Rob Jones

MTM Australia

DNA testing at birth a child's right to their heritage

- A child's right to has or her heritage.
- knowledge of parents/grandparents genomes may allow medical intervention to prevent condemning children to debilitating or life threatening diseases

It is every adult's right to know the truth of their identity and this begins in the cradle.

Dian Underwood JP

GRANS (grandparent's rights need support & growing relationships network support)

Paternal Betrayal is the greatest crime of all !

It is a triple betrayal: Firstly to discover that this greatest love of your life is based on a lie.

Secondly it is a betrayal of marriage. With that it is also a huge financial fraud, children are expensive!

But most importantly, the third betrayal is that these poor children are denied their human right to even know one of their natural parents. Like adopted children, these betrayed kids, are lied to and never meet their natural fathers

Kids need their NATURAL fathers

There is legal reform coming in Australia! It started with the case of Liam Magill. Liam discovered that two of the kids he loved and was supporting were another man's, due to his ex-wife's adultery.

Free for Her, but Illegal for Him - DNA testing

Today a woman can accuse any man she wants and the CSA will chase him down, if necessary take him to court and force a DNA paternity test. Yet today a man who has doubts that he is the natural father needs to beg permission from the costly Divorce Court (Family Court) be allowed to get a legally recognised DNA test. The Court's strange view of "best interests of the child" means he is unlikely to get permission.

DNA testing for her is free. DNA testing for him is virtually illegal and costly. Most DNA tests are done by women. Not for love, but to get cash.

Why Kids Need Their Natural Parents

1: Pregnant in Primary School!

Natural fathers protect their girls

Girls without their natural fathers (especially girls who have a 'step-father') are at risk. They are three times more likely to become pregnant as teenagers and suffer from premature puberty. Girls who

grow up with a man who is not their natural father are likely to reach puberty in primary school!

ABC TV <http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/s958787.htm>
New Scientist http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg16422062.400daddys_girl.html

2: Today's Stem Cell Research is tomorrow's life-saving medicine

Paternal betrayal is a ticking time bomb. What if these kids need a transplant? When today's DNA research becomes tomorrow's routine medicine, today's babies are going to discover not just that they have been lied to, but that their health has been put in danger.

3: UN Human Rights of the Child is contravened by paternal betrayal

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child protects a child's "right to know and be cared for by his or her parents... The right of the child to preserve his or her... family relations... That a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will... (and) the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis." <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>

4: How often does it happen?

Nobody knows. Rates as varied as 3% to 30% of all kids are quoted. But even if it is only 3%? Doesn't every child have the right to know their natural parents? Keeping DNA testing practically illegal for men keep the truth hidden and protects the guilty. It stops children from even having a chance to know who their dad is.

James ADAMS in conjunction with
Cheryl King and Liam Magill
www.PaternalBetrayalAustralia.com.au

A Draft Policy For Men's Liberation

Until recently, most discussion in our societies about men's difficulties has been focused on concern about men's tendency toward "criminal or anti-social behaviour." In recent years, some attention has been given to issues relating to men and health. As we reach for greater awareness in this area, we are forced to realize that men have fared and fare very badly. Men die younger than women.

The process of growing from boyhood to manhood is beset by a deliberate discouragement and suppression of men's abilities to feel their own emotions and to discharge the distressed ones. Fear, grief, loneliness, and uncertainty are often covered over with a pretence of "confidence."

We need to say clearly and dramatically to parents and teachers that any small child (female as well as male) can, with persistent, informed support, be protected to emerge as an outstanding individual, universally celebrated for his or her brilliant qualities. We need to call for and launch organizational efforts to see to it that parents, schools, and religious institutions are informed and organized to stop the damage to males at the little-boy stage and to continue to protect them as they grow older so that they can be boldly and powerfully intelligent, kind, and effective.

Men's stories have not been told -the "real" stories, that is, not just the "public" versions permitted by the "tightness" on men in the culture. When the real stories are told, then the real issues become clearer. Organizing men's groups in which men "take turns listening" to each other is a basic necessity for men. Being seen as the "bad ones" in society leaves men little room for recovery from their hurts.

Nearly everyone in our societies plays some role in men's rigid life choices, and nearly everyone has rigid attitudes and "beliefs" that are systemically hard on men. It will be essential in ending men's very tight life situation to change these widely held attitudes and beliefs. It helps in the task of clarifying the situation, and organizing to change it, if we identify particular institutions as the agents of major destruction in men's lives.

The liberation of women and of men go hand in hand. The forward movement of both men and women must at all times remain constructive and cooperative towards the other.

Most of the difficulties endured by men are caused by males having internalised and accepted the negative attitudes and behaviours that began in institutions and lie as poor policy towards males.

These recordings, when restimulated, leave the man on whom the recordings have been made feeling discouraged, isolated, guilty, depressed, angry, and vulnerable to interacting with other men's negative recordings in mutual hostility, disappointment, etc.

The most effective means for contradicting the acceptance of men's difficulties is to find ways for men to become intelligent parts of each other's lives to show their flexible, warm, mutually-appreciative selves to each other.

The Principal Institutions Which Carry on Destructive Policy and Behaviour towards Men.

- * the armed services
- * the criminal courts, police, and prisons
- * the workplace
- * the "sex industries"
- * the alcohol, tobacco, pharmaceutical, and illegal drug industries
- * the "sports industries"
- * schools
- * religions
- * the family

There is a relationship among these institutions. All of these institutions in some way serve the functioning of the economic system. While the economy both serves everyone's survival interests it is also distorted by greed as the primary motivator. Men's lives are used as fuel. Men's primary role is as a worker.

There is competition for the "right" to exploit natural resources and markets. Military action and war are used to protect their "national interests." The criminal "justice" system defends primarily the current structure of the economy. The addictive "power" of the sports, drug, and sex industries acts to keep the individual workers addicted and so able to keep working. Schools, religions, and families are the channels and the places where the message about "what it is to be a man" is formulated and taught, and where people are trained and re-trained for participation in the system and for submission to it.

These large social forces and the effect they have on men, hold lives in rigid unworkability we see in all the ways men's issues are encountered.

For males lives to have health and wellbeing, men's specific issues need to be addressed in the policies of these institutions.

<http://www.mensnetwork.com.au>

Indigenous Health and the importance of Fatherhood and Traditional Families

Brief background on my life as a child growing up in Aboriginal communities in northern New South Wales and south Queensland.

Missions/Reserves

Initiative of the Government

- Different tribal groups placed together under one government (mission)
- Different practices and social structures
- Violence between different groups
- Systems creating welfare dependency

Loss of roles within the family structure

- No need for men to house, hunt or provide for families.
- Loss of identity as Men

Working on the asbestos mines

- Paid cheap wages and Alcohol
- Alcohol abuse
- Break down in the family unit
- Domestic violence
- Incest

Men fighting for dominance

- Drunken violent confrontations

'What walks in the father, runs in the children!'

When Christian Revival came to the mission! The turning point!

Thoughts on addressing the immediate problems

Working Together: A Unified effort, between Indigenous communities and Government to address all the above.

Funds have to be earmarked to provide better housing, culturally and environmentally friendly.

Health

Environmental/ Physical

Clean water and better sewage and drainage.

Child sexual abuse has become a major issue in most communities through out our nation.

Strategies to be developed along with the communities and church groups to combat this crisis situation. **Our children are our future.**

Education and Employment are primary tools for the long term solution. No short term fixes!

Equip Indigenous people with the tools to address the overall social problems they are confronted with.

Empower Indigenous pride and a sense of self worth of accomplishment,

for too long, non Indigenous people have been doing the work for us.

Strong Family Unit, holds the key

- Men reclaiming their roles
- Strong male role models
- Restored sense of purpose

*Strong families, make strong communities. Strong Communities, make a strong nation!
People need to again, feel a sense of belonging.*

Fatherhood and Families Forum

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Breakout 2: Family Law and CSA

Recommendations

Social policy and Family Law is committed to meeting the best interests of children. However, children do not exist in a vacuum. They are part of a larger family system consisting of mum, dad, grandparents and others. When social policy or Family Law meets the needs of one family member to the exclusion of others, anger and resentment builds, impacting on all family members. Therefore, when the needs of the whole family are met, the best interests of children will be served. Existing inequities in social policy and Family Law have been identified by pressure groups who have successfully lobbied on behalf of mothers, fathers, children and grandparents. This has facilitated changes to the Family Law system and the Child Support Scheme. However, the focus of these reforms has remained on children, excluding the needs of all family members. On this basis, it is unlikely that the best interests of children will be served.

Men typically re-partner within one to two years post separation, thereby forming a second family. Given current definitions of family, and the way family types are counted, members of second families remain hidden in a system unable to meet their needs. For example, when determining child residency in Family Law, it is unlikely that the needs of a non-residential stepmother and her own child (a biological sibling to the child of the first relationship) would be considered. Children of first and second relationships have a right to maintain a meaningful sibling relationship. Recent changes to the Child Support Scheme have ensured that approximate equality is granted to children of first and second relationships in the calculation of child support. However, the financial needs of second partners have not been considered beyond a slight increase in exempted income when re-partnering occurs. This inequity negatively impacts on all relationships within second families and across first and second families. When conflict is high, the social and emotional well being of children in both family types is threatened. Therefore, social policy and law must meet the needs of all family members in all types of families. On this basis, we recommend the following :

Reconceptualise current definitions of family to include all family types.

This will require moving away from a nuclear family model to be more inclusive of the diverse range of families that exist in society today.

Change the way families are counted in order to identify hidden parties.

For example, non-residential parents (typically fathers) are not counted as families.

Develop policies and law that meet the needs of all family members.

It must be acknowledged that what impacts on one member of a family will impact on all members of the family. For example, if the needs of mothers, fathers and grandparents are not met, this will impact on children. If the needs of second partners are not met, this will also impact on children. If the needs of children to second relationships are not met, this will also impact on children from first relationships.

Develop policies and law that meet the longer term needs of all family types.

For example, recent changes to the Child Support Scheme only meet the transitional needs of separating families for two to five years. After that time, re-partnering has typically occurred. Second families are then tied to a system based on a nuclear family model that fails to address their needs.

Research must inform the development of social policy, law, support services and educational initiatives.

A research agenda must be carefully constructed to facilitate well informed developments. For example, there is limited research examining the experience of second families. Therefore, the Ministerial Task Force examining the Child Support Scheme was not able to adequately address their needs.

Policies and legislation must be continually evaluated.

Continual evaluation will ensure that the needs of all family members and family types are being adequately addressed. A commitment to long term family health and wellbeing will lead to long term cost effective benefits.

Dr Pamela Henry
Senior Lecturer / Coordinator Criminology and Justice

Natalie Gately
Lecturer / DUMA Site Manager

School of Law and Justice, Edith Cowan University

SPCA Policy

The Shared Parenting Council believes in the fundamental principal of a presumption of equal time notwithstanding the safety of children is paramount and the ability of one or other of the parents to support equal or substantially equal time arrangements

The **SPCA** supports and will continue to promote equal time parenting as the preferred and normative starting point and final outcome for all separating couples who are fit parents and desire to continue and maximize their relationships with their children.

- To promote the family as the fundamental social unit of society;
- To encourage and support parents, to jointly and equitably share the rights, duties and responsibilities of parenthood;
- To promote the fundamental rights of children to maintain frequent and continuing contact with both their mother and father following parental separation or divorce and to experience and enjoy, the love, guidance and companionship of both their parents in an equal and shared manner;
- To advocate the enactment of Commonwealth and/or State legislation which establishes a rebuttable presumption in favour of both shared residence and shared parenting responsibility;
- To bring to the attention of relevant Commonwealth and/or State authorities the social and legal circumstances of separated families, and to ensure their interests are safe-guarded in the implementation of legal and administrative systems affecting them;
- To raise public and official awareness of social policy which acts against the best interests of children, and exposes them to unacceptable risk of emotional or physical harm;
- To advocate the right of children to the continuing emotional, moral, physical and financial support of their mothers and fathers following separation or divorce;
- To advocate the enactment of Commonwealth and/or State legislation which encourages the continuing involvement of their mothers and fathers in the support of their children following parental separation or divorce.
- To ensure that appropriate wording is reflected in all legislative instruments and Acts that reflects a direction to make orders and policies that enact shared parenting outcomes.

The **SPCA** will continue to advocate that as much of the jointly held parental responsibility, duties and decision making, and time lived with children that is enjoyed by both parents in the intact home, be preserved for the rich benefit of children after separation or divorce. In particular the **SPCA** will advocate that court orders, which are

injunctions on people's freedoms, be used sparingly to impact as little as possible on these relationships other than to ensure equal shared parental responsibility and maximize parenting time the child enjoys living with both parents. Children should thus be allowed, without injunction, to enjoy a rich childhood filled with the love and nurturance of both parents and all the affections of home that come with living equally with their mother and their father in both parents' respective homes.

The **SPCA** recognises that denial of contact between children and their parents on the basis of unsubstantiated allegations or to obtain a strategic advantage in custody proceedings or to punish the other parent is harmful and a form of child abuse. **SPCA** supports and advocates the principle of no unilateral summary exclusion of either parent immediately following a separation and that the law should protect the right of the child not to be excluded from the life of the other parent.

The **SPCA** advocates the abolition of the institutionalised segregation of children from one of their parents, grandparents, extended family and loved ones by the erroneous and expedient deference to the Best Interest Principle when no best interest is served by rendering a child parentless.

The **SPCA** recognises the presence of a Second Stolen Generation of children made parentless by misplaced social policies and institutionalised segregation and that all effort must be made to end incidents of segregation of children from their biological mother and father where both parents are fit and willing to parent their children.

The **SPCA** will maintain a continuing public education campaign to bring about further change in attitudes after separation

The **SPCA** believes in fairness in Child Support and supports the notion that children must be accommodated financially by both parents after separation.

After extensive work reviewing judgements during 2006 and 2007 the **SPCA** has commenced work on additional modifications to sections of the Family Law Act that preclude shared parenting time when one or other of the parental parties is requesting such time with children.

The **Shared Parenting Council** looks forward to support from other groups in achieving constructive and beneficial change both in the Family Law legislation and in Child Support Legislation process and reforms that will have far reaching effects during 2007 and 2008.

Additional Policy information and current work in progress can be viewed on our web site

Federal Director Executive Secretary

www.sPCA.org.au

secretariat@sPCA.org.au

Family Law and the Public Purse

Family friendly policy proposals. We need to undertake a cost benefit analysis of all legislation policies and practices of the Federal government which impact on families. In the first instance this would include: social security; family Law; child support and taxation. In my one-page I will attempt to address two issues; child support and family Law.

All legislation and government-sponsored activities should be analysed for their effects under three categories:

technical, is workable and does it achieve the aim is that it claims? Can it be understood and implemented in uncomplicated ways? Is it efficient? Is it economically sustainable?

political, does it have a broad support of the community? Does it have the consent of the people upon which it is impacting? Has it led to a strengthening of the community or a destruction of the Commonwealth? Is it lawful? Is it Constitutional? Does it challenge or seek to redistribute power within the community?

moral. Is it for a worthwhile purpose does it respect persons equally? is it for the greater good of the nation?

Child Support: a simple analysis of the figures indicate that child support measures fail the economic sustainability test. CSA claims of benefits to NCP's remain contested as a cost benefit analysis of the CSA has never been properly carried out. This is notwithstanding the fact that a number of Parliamentary inquiries have found widespread evidence of illegality; failure to follow due process; failure to apply commonly accepted standards of public administration and widespread misuse of private information including tax file numbers. This evidence is on the public record and has been read into Hansard of the parliament. A proper audit of the scheme and its liabilities would indicate that the CSA cannot be sustained on financial terms. The scheme is

coercive and has never received the broad support of the Australian public let alone a majority of the persons it claims to be helping. The legislation does not require monies exacted for the purposes of child support to be spent on the support of children. The cost of collection and the average amount paid the custodial parents is less than what was being paid prior to the scheme being brought into operation. In a period of record low unemployment figures the unemployment rate for non-custodial parents remain significantly higher than that for the general population. The cost of suicide of non-custodial parents (reported to be at around 20 per week) has never been admitted or calculated particularly as this transfers 100% of the cost of supporting the child to the custodial parent and the Commonwealth.

Family Law. An analysis of the family Law Act's impact upon Australian society has never been undertaken. This is despite the fact that the Court has its own research Institute. As with the child support agency, evidence read into Hansard from Parliamentary inquiries indicated this is a failed social experiment which has impacted most severely upon the rights of children to maintain access with both parents following divorce or dissolution of their marriage. The family Law act claims to be 'no fault'. However, the determination and application of fault has been reintroduced into the activities and judgments of the Court through a gender specific determination of particular forms of domestic violence and child abuse. The Court has created a second 'stolen generation'. The economic effects of the distribution of property are yet to mature. The destruction of family property and superannuation entitlements will mean that a significant number of divorced persons will be reliant upon old-age pensions to fund their retirement.

Dr Robert Kelso, Central Queensland University.

Shared parenting helps mothers and kids too

Relieving stressed single mums

Children who live with lone parents are at much higher risk of abuse and neglect than those who have both their natural parents to protect them.

Single parents suffer from all kinds of hardship. Too often they can't hold everything together. Tragically, that's when children suffer.

Looking after a child 24-7 is stressful. The frustrations of the day-to-day grind, of a baby who won't stop crying, of isolation can lead to frustration and innocent child cops-it.

Children are born with two parents. Each can be a fail-safe, watching out for their kid. There are signs of neglect or abuse... a parent *who* has loved a child since birth can't miss these signs. Shared residence protects kids.

Equal shared residence gives both parents time off to relax and unwind. Shared parenting relieves stressed single mothers.

Mummies-new-boyfriend -

Remember Cinderella?

Many parents re-marry and the new partner can become a loving step-parent. But some children are not so lucky. Remember Cinderella?

Sadly, children living with a single mother often share house with a string of non-committed men – “mummies-new-boyfriends”.

The research proves that violence and abuse of children is almost always committed by the mother or “mummies-new-boyfriend”.

Research shows that children are 2000% more at risk of when living with an unrelated adult, typically a boyfriend or stepfather.

Cunning Paedophiles

Sole mothers and their children are emotionally and financially vulnerable. Single mothers can crave love and their children crave their natural father.

Today it is hard for a paedophile to get access to children. Tragically paedophiles have realised that the easiest way to get access to children is to romance a vulnerable single mother. Abusing the kids and also taking advantage of the vulnerable mother.

Real facts about real children, not theory

Over the last thirty years, vast numbers of children have grown up in single parent homes. Finally there are many large, well-controlled studies that prove children do best living with both their natural parents, even if that is in two houses.

Help for struggling mums

Children growing up in single-parent families suffer. Where both parents are welfare dependant, the financial contribution that a non-custodial parent can make is very small.

However the contribution of time could be very valuable, allowing both parents to have time with the kids, some free-time and time to find work or improve themselves. Sole custody disadvantages the most needy mothers.

Remember all family members

Around one third of the fatherhood and families movement are women. These women are usually second-wives and grand parents... who, along with fathers and children, are treated as second-tier family members, especially in relation to CSA and shared parenting.

Real parents make a real difference

Girls that grow up without their natural dad reach puberty 9 months earlier and are over three more likely to become pregnant as teenagers. Often these girls reach puberty in primary school.

Liam Magill is not the only victim of paternity betrayal, the children also were denied their right to know and be cared for by their natural father. Children need their natural families; DNA testing should be *automatic* at birth.

Shared residence saves marriages

In Australia, over two thirds of divorces are initiated by the woman, partly because she has less to lose than the father. If you get the kids, you get everything!

US States that have high rates of sole-custody orders have high rates of divorce. Also when divorce laws have changed, so have divorce rates. Increasing shared custody orders decreases divorce rates.

A presumption of shared parenting saves marriages. And in their natural family is the best place for kids to grow up.

James ADAMS

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http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/family_law/submissions/sublist.htm (submission 110).

Policy recommendations

The Lone Fathers Association of Australia applauds the innovative and far-reaching legislation introduced by the present Government in relation to shared parental responsibility and the child support scheme, and notes the bipartisan support shown for that legislation in the Parliament. The LFAA urges Parliament to continue the present level of bipartisan support, and not to allow the approach - important as it is in so many ways to the future health of the Australian community - to be undermined in future by revisionist pressure groups.

The LFAA also strongly supports the provisions in the new legislation designed to discourage false allegations of abuse in order to secure an advantage in a divorce settlement, particularly in relation to custody of children.

The LFAA further believes that the integrity of the relationship between parents and their biological children should be respected and protected by the community. Scientific developments have made it possible for the first time in history to ascertain what these relationships are with virtually 100% accuracy, and the opportunity to avoid paternity fraud is now available through DNA testing of all children at birth. That should now become an officially supported practice.

Barry Williams
President

NCPP (Equal Parenting) Policy

1. The Problem

The Problem is that Australia's Family Law and Child Support system is a National Disaster.

equality – the party that brought in Medicare, etc.

2. The Reason for the Problem.

The Reason for the Problem is the desire by Governments to have unequivocal equal pay for women.

The Liberal Party of Australia/Nationals are conservatives. Therefore they are *reluctant* to change the status quo.

3. The Solution to the Problem.

The Solution is to provide equality for all. This is as set out in the Fathers in Families' 12 Point Plan. (National Strategic Conference on Fatherhood, Parliament House, Canberra – 18-19 August 2003)

5. The Question.

The question is which political party will ultimately provide the right Solution to the Problem - the Australian Labor Party or Liberal Party of Australia/Nationals?

4. The Means of Achieving the Solution.

The Australian Labor Party *should* be the political party that will achieve the solution. It is supposed to be a party based on 15 June 2007.

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Policy for fairness

Fairness in Child Support (FICS) is a Wollongong based group of non-custodial parents concerned about the injustices in Family Law and Child Support legislation and practise.

FICS believes that the recent changes to Family Law and Child Support legislation have not only failed to produce any significant reform, but have underpinned the existing bias against fathers. This is because there has been no review of either the fundamentals of the legislation, or of the ideological base upon which these fundamentals stand.

The presupposition that fathers, from the very moment of separation, become incapable of making any competent decisions about the care of their children is foundational to the operation and very existence of the Family Court and Child Support Agency (CSA). As a consequence, these institutions have been primarily responsible for the defathering of Australian society.

The justification that the CSA and the Family Court are necessary because separated parents do not agree is invalid. On the contrary, the interference of these institutions creates and promotes disharmony and disputes between parents by providing entitlements and privileges for one parent at the expense of the other.

Parents should be left alone to determine the best interests of their children. This can best be achieved in the following ways:

The repeal of the Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989 and its related legislation.

The abolition of the CSA.

Legislation that enshrines the principle of post-separation shared and equal parenting time and responsibility as the default position if disputes cannot be resolved.

Accountability of the Family Court. This requires the removal of section 121 of the Family Law Act.

In addition we consider it right that the government be held accountable for its actions. It should provide both an apology and financial compensation for the victims of past injustices resulting from Family Law and Child Support legislation. This should be directed to:

The stolen generation of children who have been denied the right to be cared for by both of their parents.

All parents who, without good reason, have been denied contact with their children.

All parents who have been unwilling participants in the child support scheme. This would include both payers and payees. In the case of payers the financial compensation should be equivalent to the amount of Child Support paid. (The CSA specifically excludes from Child Support the cost of providing food, clothing, transport and shelter. This means that Child Support effectively becomes a financial inducement for one parent to deny the other parent contact with their children.)

CSA takes from the poor to give to the rich

Children live in households

Here is a pretty typical situation. Two parents divorce, she gets the kids. Both re-partner and they end up each with two kids... the mother has his original kids, and the dad has one kid that came with his new wife, and they have had one kid together.

Dad's place

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One wage (dad)• Two kids• One dependant wife (with a young baby)• Paying child support |
|---|

= **Poor house**

Mother's house

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two wages• Two kids• No dependant adults• gets child support |
|---|

= **Rich house**

The rules ignore new spouses... so Dad's dependant spouse and her dependant kid are ignored.

Meanwhile Mum's new breadwinner is ignored, yet both those rich kids are treated as if she is supporting them alone.

The double standards are blatant... If you are on the dole, and you hook-up with somebody (marry, de-facto) this affects your dole payment. Adults live in households, apparently... but if you are a CSA receiving mother and you get married, your new husband's income is irrelevant...

Who made up these rules? They aren't fair... they hurt children and they hurt dads... Sadly they also provide financial incentives for family breakup.

Sadly, the money flows from the poor kids to their rich half-siblings.

If everybody working earns the average wage, Dad's household has \$40,000, while the mothers house has \$110,000 (before tax). The CSA (under the new formula) is \$9000 from the father after tax which the mother gets tax free.

Not only that, the mother got the bulk of the families assets when they divorced. She owns the house and dad has to pay rent.

This is the sort of problem that occurs when you forget the fundamental truth that that kids live in families, in households.

What Needs To Be Accomplished?

A Call To The Nation

We call upon Australia's leaders to join with us in the great task of renewing a marriage culture. We propose five principles to guide this effort:

Make supporting marriage - not just marriage neutrality - the goal. Healthy marriages benefit the whole community. Conversely, when marriages fail, huge personal and public costs are generated. If we can help more marriages to succeed, it would be wrong to settle for policies that are merely neutral about marriage.

Respect the special status of marriage. Do not extend the benefits of marriage to couples who could marry, but choose not to. Offering the social and legal benefits of marriage to cohabiting couples unfairly and unwisely weakens the special option of marriage.

Reconnect marriage and childbearing. Do not discourage married couples from having children as they choose, and encourage young men and women to wait to have children until they have made good marriages.

Do not discourage marital interdependence by penalizing unpaid work in homes and communities. Couples should be free to divide up labour however they choose without pressure from policies that discriminate against at-home parenting and other activities that serve civil society.

Promote both the ideal of marital permanence and the aspiration couples today have for more satisfying marriage relationships

We urge you to:

- Make strengthening, supporting and promoting marriage an explicit goal of government policy, accompanied by explicit criteria to measure success, such as a reduction in the divorce rate and an increase in the proportion of children born inside of marriage. Insist that a "Family Impact Statement" is properly considered with all new legislation.
- Increase funding for marriage research, including: basic research on marital processes that impact mental health and the success of marriages; intervention research designed to investigate ways to improve marriages; and evaluation research. Support new research to investigate the economic costs shifted to business and taxpayers when marriages fail or fail to form.
- Resist the continued attempts to undermine the strength of marriage and its proven position as the best-practice model for raising children by those desiring to extend the benefits of marriage to same-sex and other relationships.
- Given the powerful relationship between marriage and mental and physical health, all federal and state health departments should make collecting and analysing data on marriage and divorce an important priority.

- Consider using part of designated welfare money to fund marriage-supportive activities, from sponsoring marriage mentoring and marriage education campaigns to school-based education programs about the value and importance of marriage. Earmark funds for evaluation research, so that effective program components can be identified and replicated.

- Restrict the availability of pornography by making internet filtering mandatory by all ISPs.

- Promote and provide or subsidise marriage and parenting education programs for couples considering marriage or seeking to improve their marriage and provide much easier tax deductible gift recipient status for community-based organisations providing services in these areas.

- Reduce marriage penalties in the tax system and in other programs, without creating inadvertent homemaker penalties in their stead, and encourage parents to be the primary providers of child care.

- Incorporate a marriage dimension in all existing teen pregnancy, fatherhood, and sex education programs. Make persuading teens to wait to have children until they are mature enough to make a good marriage an explicit goal of all government-funded education programs.

- Hold marriage summits to pull together stakeholders in marriage from religious, business, counselling, child welfare, and family organizations, as well as from federal, state, and local governments, to highlight the importance of marriage.

- Highlight the public health and other benefits of marriage through public education and advertising campaigns.

- Reform mediation programs provided by Family Relationship Centres so that they seek to facilitate reconciliations, rather than merely expedite the divorce process. Fund evaluation research to see which divorce education programs meet the goal of both reducing divorce acrimony and preventing unnecessary divorce.

- Reconsider no-fault divorce laws and find innovative new ways to give legal weight to the marriage vow. For example, a longer waiting period slows down the divorce process, gives counselling a chance to work, offers some power to the spouse who wants to stay married, and at the very least gives the spouse who is being divorced time to recover emotionally before being plunged into life-altering legal decisions.

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Review of past Orders

Given that the Family Court has recognised the inappropriateness of Family Court policy prior to the changes in July 2006 by denying children adequate contact with their fathers / non-custodial parents, parents should have the opportunity to have their situation reviewed.

They should be able to pay for a mediation session at an FRC (eg say \$300 for three hours mediation) to renegotiate contact arrangements with the other parent.

Failing agreement, the mediator can forward a report to the Family Court system, and the parent seeking review can submit a document to the judge (no more than four pages) outlining their reasons for a review and what they are seeking.

The judge can then decide whether to hear the case by speaking to the parents directly

(without solicitors present and without affidavits).

Such hearings would be recorded and recordings made available to both parents. In the absence of child abuse or insurmountable practical problems the judge would have to consider "why not equal parenting?" (or the amount of parenting less than 50% that the parent seeking review is asking).

Geoff Holland

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Creative Urgent Action in the best interests of Australia's children~parents~families

The Problem is our Nation's Biggest {Hidden} Social Problem and Number One Election Issue:-

Over some 31 years Australia has built a multi\$billion "Human Misery Killjoy Industry" culture such as the self-serving Family Law Court System.

Australia must discover ways and means to create and nurture the productivity of positive HAPPINESS & JOY happening for Children, Mums, Dads, Grandparents and Families.

The Fatherhood Foundation estimates the annual damage and loss to Australia is \$30 Billion and growing fast. This is a National Scandal of Shame.

We have a 'secret' epidemic disease of parental alienation, exclusion and vilification that destroys Children's lives. Death of parents from suicide, heart attacks, strokes, etc, correlates with the stress and trauma inflicted by Australia's Family Law Court System where health and financial breakdowns are common fodder of this hateful Misery Syndrome.

Every 2 minutes nationwide there is a report of "child abuse, cruelty, neglect or death". Standover "bullying" is rampant throughout our Society from bureaucracy to corporations to the Family Law Court System to our schools. What gives in terms of our Quality of Life Consciousness and Conscience? Something is terribly wrong in terms of the very misery and sadness from a wounded heart and soul concerning the mores and psyche of everyday People in our potentially great Nation.

Constructive & Positive Solutions

- Raising of much needed Awareness \$FUNds, Resources and Support. Purpose being to nurture and protect the amazing grassroots self-help collaboration, co+operation and working together of capable, efficient and effective goodwill people and groups building Community & Family. The unsung heroes and national living treasures selflessly devoting their lives to this Community Service Work.

- Without the heartless "big brother" control/power interference that stifles and strangles self-help, create authentic personal empowerment plus health & wellbeing programs, projects and services that truly benefit people in terms of HAPPINESS. Thus immediately transform the destructive "Human Misery Killjoy Industry" that is destroying Australian Society.

Protect basic Human & Legal Rights by providing the fighting funds and legal expertise knowhow "teeth" to have the proper balance in mounting appeals, class actions and landmark test cases to combat child abuse, injustices and the insidious secrecy of the Family Law Court System violations of Law & Love.

Priority Creative Action

There is a 387 day countdown preparation and pre+production unique opportunity with the 11-13 July 2008 International Creativity SUMMIT for Children~Parents~Families to be held in the beautiful Newcastle Region of NSW Australia.

A grassroots Community Partnership Initiative of Imagination Wealth. UNITY in Diversity.

See the holistic OverView 10 Domains for this positive Creativity SUMMIT Vision+Mission.

This Event coincides with the WORLD YOUTH DAY Program from 14-20 July '08 where Pope Benedict XVI will make an OZ Odyssey downunder. Some 900,000 young people from around the World will attend.

The Australian Government has contributed \$26 Million to the Catholic Church for this Event on behalf of us the People.

Conclusion

We now ASK the Australian Government for a similar commitment to invest immediately \$27 Million in order to urgently build authentic empowerment and healing from grassroots for our precious Children~Parents~Families who are our Nation's Greatest asset and hope for the future.

This can happen immediately via effective and efficient "self help" community partnership initiatives available through the gathering, netweaving, galvanizing and facilitating mechanism tool of the collaborative...

International Creativity SUMMIT for Children~Parents~Families.

The Dads/Mens Movement of Australia has the opportunity to lead the way through an example of "UNITY in Diversity" encompassing all Children, Mums, Dads, Grandparents, and Families in Australia. Especially would there be an embracing and working together with the Australian Aboriginal Community whose culture, heritage and traditions have much to teach us. Lessons from the horrors of the "Stolen Generation" crimes inflicted upon them over 219 years. These great people of ancient knowledge and smiling wisdom are able to show us the way with a grace of genuine forgiveness and healing we all need to enjoy.

The CREATIVITY CENTRE,
Ph (02) 4944 8968; creativitycentre8@hotmail.com

Protect a child's family relationships

We need to protect children from having half of their family stolen from them by the other parent. We must abolish the unilateral exclusion of one parent by the other parent following separation.

Most custody disputes are brought about by the excluded parent who just wants to be equally involved with their children (usually in the belief that the Courts will protect their children). If one parent wasn't able to exclude the other parent unilaterally most of these cases would not occur.

Unfortunately once the status quo of sole custody has been established, the excluded parent (usually the father) must face an exhaustive and destructive processes of assessment and litigation to persuade the court to grant him reasonable involvement with his children.

So the solution is simple...

Provide a simple order, similar to an interim order, to protect a child's contact with both parents.

This must be as easily obtained as an AVO.

The aim is to maintain the status quo for the child, reduce the trauma and reducing the child-snatching that the present 'possession is nine-tenths of family law' regime encourages.

Most children see both parents every day, and so the orders should attempt to reproduce this situation for children.

Maintain the status-quo to save children from trauma

For the cases that do come to court (after the abolition of unilateral exclusion), the courts can continue their practice of supporting the status quo whilst they wrestle with the various arguments, accusations and evidence in the knowledge that the children's best interests are served by maintaining the love protection and support of both their parents, whilst avoiding the conflict caused when one parent is unilaterally excluded by the other.

An excluded parent would be able to get immediate relief from the Family Court by way of a court order protecting the children's right of association with both its parents, thereby halting any attempt to establish a status quo of sole custody.

This process would be similar to the AVO process - ie: it would be effective immediately and subject to a court hearing if opposed.

Sharing prevents conflict

Preventing a parent from being excluded – prevents the incentive for custody litigation (in most cases). It really is this simple.

Each parent would continue to be able to apply for sole custody if they have concerns. If there is a case to be answered, if the father for example is a danger to his children, then the drastic solutions of supervised access and/or exclusion would still be available.

Natural protections

Equal access for both parents to their children is a child's right. Abolishing unilateral exclusion of one parent by the other represents a change of focus. It provides for a **rebuttable presumption of equal time shared parenting** by emphasising the needs to protect children, from the outset of separation.

The protection of the child's right to both its parents would prevent most custody litigations from starting and enable intelligent and respectful negotiation between parents with out intimidation, based on the best interests of the child, as opposed to the use of allegations to protect a status quo that has been wrongfully established.

Family Relationship centres would remain available for separating couples.

Accusations of partner abuse would be dealt with by using the school, kindergarten, and other third party arrangements including Government Contact Centres as a last resort, so that the children are protected from the alienation and exclusion of the accused parent or any conflict associated with the allegations.

Simon Hunt
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The 12pt Plan and the National Strategic Conference on Fatherhood are the work of hundreds of groups and individuals. The policy proposals contained in these recommendations were formulated in a bi-partisan manner with 100% consensus for the 12pt Plan Policy Proposals and over 80% consensus at the NSCF - quite a remarkable feat. It is a credit to the Government and the Opposition that some changes to the Family Law System and the Child Support Scheme have occurred. We honour the parliamentarians on both sides who have stood for justice. Much more needs to be done in these areas. In the vast majority of cases, not much has changed when it comes to men's/fathers' family friendly policy in the last five years. So the Fatherhood Foundation again offers up these policy platforms on behalf of the hundreds of individuals and groups that helped formulate them to our friends in parliament.

Yours for our children
Warwick Marsh

Fathers4Families

Fathers4Equality

Fathers4Equality is proud to assist in the organisation of this forum. Fathers4Equality is an incorporated association of activists dedicated to fairness and equality between the genders. We believe that children need both parents.

The greatest love of all is a parent's love for their child... and love will find a way to overcome all the adversity of sex discrimination against families and dads. We focus on family law, boys education, male suicide and the status of men.

I have a dream!
James Adams (PartTimeParent)
www.Fathers4Families.org.au

Strengthening and Supporting Australian Fathers

Preamble

The greatest resource this country possesses lies in the families of our nation. At the same time, the strength of our families depends on the quality of the relationships between its mothers and fathers. The quality of the relationships between mothers and fathers and their children will determine the destiny of Australia. The future of Australia lies in the character of her children. Equipping and supporting fathers and mothers in their relationships helps ensure that our children have the best possible future.

The National Fathering Forum believes that every child has the fundamental right to both a mother and a father. The best way to secure this right is to establish a loving and stable marriage between a man and a woman for life. This long-term relationship facilitates the rights of grandmothers and grandfathers to continued access and valuable input into their grandchildren.

The overwhelming conclusion of current social science research has shown that the best environment for children is a close, warm, sustained and continuous relationship with both biological parents. The best way to ensure strong families is to support strong marriages. This traditional family unit - a loving father, mother and their children - is the best way to nurture, educate and protect children. This is the best social security system the world has ever known.

However for a variety of different reasons, many fathers do not find themselves in a marriage relationship. Therefore irrespective of their marital status, we want to support all dads to fulfil their role as effective fathers.

Fatherlessness can be defined as the absence of an active, positive father-influence in the lives of children. Fatherlessness is both a natural and spiritual problem. It needs strategic and synergistic partnerships that should involve government, business, church, community, faith-based and secular charities and many others working together to strengthen and support Australian fathers.

History

On 10th February 2003, over 35 people gathered for the inaugural National Fathering Forum at Parliament House Canberra. Twenty-five delegates spoke at the Forum. The delegates represented a wide range of Men's Groups, Family Law Reform Groups, Education & Training Institutions, Academics, Social Researchers and Psychologists, Drug Rehabilitation Organisations, Prison Charities, Social Reform Networks, Church Groups, Journalists and Media, Family Focused Charitable Organisations and Fatherhood Institutions. All came at their own cost with the common goal to strengthen

and support Australian fathers and 'to turn the tide of fatherlessness' that exists in Australia.

The forum delegates who presented papers are united by the common belief that fatherlessness and family breakdown are major social problems in Australian society. The following Twelve Point Plan was agreed upon by a consensus of the delegates. This policy document puts forward some key recommendations to address these problems.

The National Fathering Forum does not see this Twelve Point Plan as a final document. Rather we see it as the first of many proposals to promote discussion and contribute to a coordinated national solution to turn the tide of fatherlessness and strengthen Australian fathers.

We commend the Parliamentarians from the different parties in both Houses who supported the National Fathering Forum Open Session by their attendance and input on 10th February 2002. We invite further comment and look forward to the National Fatherhood Conference to be held on 18th & 19th August 2003 in Federal Parliament with a National Fatherhood Summit to be held in August 2004.

The Social Problem

One of the greatest challenges facing our nation is the social problems caused as a result of Fatherlessness. Australia's current birth rate of 1.75 births per female has fallen below the minimum population replacement rate of 2.1 births per female. Fatherlessness is a direct factor in this decline.^{1, 2 & 3.}

The problem of Fatherlessness has been estimated to cost Australia over \$13 billion per year⁴. Bill Muehlenberg in his article titled "*The Facts on Fatherlessness*" (refer Appendix) has identified the following social and psychological problems

- Poverty.
- Lower educational performance.
- Increased crime.
- Increased drug abuse.
- Increased mental health problems.
- Increased child abuse.

While not every child who grows up in a fatherless situation will experience either one or any of these problems, there is a much greater statistical likelihood that he or she would.

Studies into the potential impact of growing up without a father in the United States have produced the following statistics in relation to boys.⁵

Boys from a fatherless home are:

- more likely to commit suicide;
- more likely to commit rape;
- more likely to drop out of high school;
- more likely to abuse chemicals;
- more likely to end up in a state-operated institution;
- more likely to end up in prison.

The Socio-Economic Problem

While affirmative action programs have helped women overcome past unemployment problems, there is now a growing crisis in male unemployment. This is particularly prevalent among young and middle-aged men ⁶. Male unemployment has several related unwanted socio-economic impacts:

- Fathers, and therefore families, are put under severe pressures when dads are unemployed or under-employed.
- Many men in low socio-economic circumstances will not marry and will not have children.
- Unemployed younger men are not attractive potential marriage partners amongst their female peers.

The enormous dimensions of the problem require the engagement of all 3 tiers of government with the Commonwealth leading the way. For over two decades Government rightly has looked to overcome barriers to employment so that marginalised groups would have equality of employment opportunity. Gender, race, disability, cultural and ethnic identity are no longer the opportunity barriers they once were. Inadvertently however, from these proactive policies, a new disadvantaged group has emerged.

It is now time to reassess the relevance of outdated affirmative action policies and consider a return to merit based selection where only the best person for the job is offered employment.

A Challenge to Fathers

The National Fathering Forum calls on men everywhere to offer their commitment to the ideals of fatherhood. We exhort fathers to make their primary goal in life the care and nurture of their families. We applaud the fathers of our nation who are caring for their families and urge them to become 'the best dads in the world' for the sake of their children.

The National Fathering Forum also encourages fathers who are our political, civic, community and church leaders and all those in the public arena to work towards becoming fathers of excellence. We acknowledge that we need a change in some of our laws and an increased government focus on fathers and families as contained in this Twelve Point Plan.

Through a systematic sporting development programme, Australia has produced some of the best sportsmen and women in the world. We have the best sportsmen in the world, why not the best fathers?

The Twelve Point Plan

The National Fathering Forum has formulated a Twelve Point Plan to strengthen and support fatherhood and turn the tide of fatherlessness in Australia. This is divided into 3 major categories:

I. Government

That all levels of government:

1. Acknowledge the importance of fatherhood by establishing an official body to support and strengthen Australian fathers, such as an Office of the Status of Fatherhood or a Ministry of Fatherhood.
2. Increase funding for father-based family initiatives. The focus of government funding needs to be on prevention rather than on cure in order to achieve long-term cost effective benefits.
3. Address the gross inequity in funding for men's issues compared to that currently available for women's issues. ⁷
4. Recommend that a national campaign be initiated to promote fathers and fathering, that is to be run annually.
5. Reduce inequality for low socio-economic fathers by increasing their employment opportunities. ⁶
6. Acknowledge that after divorce or parental separation, every child has a fundamental right to equal contact with both the mother and the father, unless there are proven mitigating circumstances.
7. Examine all current and future legislation both federal and state in terms of how it impacts on fathers, marriages, families and children and make adjustments accordingly. This includes such things as the Family Law Act, Tax reform for families, Child Support legislation and much more.
8. Include the word 'father' in government department language along with the word 'mother' – bringing a resultant positive change of attitude within governmental bureaucracy towards fathers ⁸. When the word 'parenting' is defined, it must state clearly that it means parental care by both mothers and fathers.

II. Education & Training

9. Education of Boys and Male Adults

The National Fathering Forum affirmed the view of a recent report ⁹ to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training that:

- While at school, more attention must be paid to the differing needs of boys and girls and their tendency to favour different learning styles. One should not be pursued at the expense of the other.
- From primary school through to tertiary education, the nature and importance of fathering should be recognised (and if needed, introduced) within the relevant curriculum standards framework.
- Boys need male role models and mentors who may be both (a) teachers/lecturers, and (b) peers. To facilitate this, there is a need to increase the participation rates of males as educators.

10. **Education of Fathers.**

Fathers, at various stages, need to be equipped and empowered through education programmes that will enable them to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills that they need to be effective parents.

The National Fathering Forum believes that:

- Just as boys and girls benefit by men positively modelling appropriate behaviour and respectful relationships with other men and women, fathers also benefit from the support they can receive from mentors in their communities.¹⁰
- There is a need for education programmes that focus on strengthening the father/mother relationship due to the effects of marital quality on fathering and child adjustment.⁸

III. *Fathers' Health and Well-Being*

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11. Being male is associated with a number of health disadvantages.^{11,12} For males, this results in higher rates of:

- Hospital admissions for most injuries and illnesses
- Premature death by unnatural causes such as suicides and accidents
- Undiagnosed mental illnesses
- Suicide
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Addictive anti-social behaviours
- Addictive gambling problems

The National Fathering Forum seeks to promote fathers' health and well-being and to reduce the health disadvantage of being male. This needs the assistance of the Government through increased government-funded initiatives.

12. The National Fathering Forum emphasised that a large number of deaths, injuries and illnesses that men experience are preventable. In addition, the health and well-being disadvantages^{11,12} of men and fathers is closely associated with social and economic disadvantage such as unemployment. Men of Aboriginal and Torres Strait descent are particularly vulnerable to these health disadvantages. These issues require an urgent response from both the government and non-government sectors.

The National Fathering Forum supports the national strategies for the prevention of: suicide, accidents, substance misuse and gambling addictions. We urge that these strategies be implemented with greater emphasis to the unique needs of men and fathers.

Forward Programme

The National Strategic Conference on Fatherhood was held on August 18th & 19th, 2003 in the Federal Parliament, Canberra. We call on the government of Australia to hold a National Summit on Fatherhood to coordinate a strategic plan to turn the tide of fatherlessness in Australia today.

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National Strategic Conference on Fatherhood

On 18th & 19th August 2003, men and father's groups, family law reform groups, pro-family charity groups, government agencies and service providers, leaders and representatives from women and mother's groups; the total number of delegates represented a wide cross-section of the Australian community. The speakers included Adrienne Burgess from the UK, Hon Larry Anthony, Minister for Children, Hon Paul Calvert, President of the Senate, Robert Kelso, Brendan Sullivan, Bettina Arndt, Pru Goward, John Hogg, Mark Latham, later to become leader of the Opposition, Hon John Anderson, Deputy Prime Minister, Richard Fletcher, Ron Williams, aboriginal leader, Hon Ross Cameron, Paul Bartlett, Warwick Marsh and Richard Yiap. Many others, too numerous to mention, contributed significantly to the strategic policy summary as listed below. It might be noted that all these recommendations received an 80% voting approval that on many points was much higher. Almost everyone who came to the conference agreed that the restoration of fatherhood in Australia was one of Australia's most pressing social problems.

Strategies

1. **Mentoring for Men & Boys** – to resource, develop and improve national mentoring programs using existing and new groups for men and boys. Systematic research is needed to evaluate and disseminate the information already learned from existing men and fatherhood groups.
2. **Transitions to Manhood** – to recognise the importance of transitional stages in the life of men and the need to honour these stages. To develop ways of teaching these transitions to all males starting at the primary school level, throughout the course of life.
3. **Honouring Fathers & Promoting Fatherhood** – to recognise, empower and encourage Australian fatherhood by creating positive images of men as fathers and highlighting the importance of their vital role in society.
4. **Legislate for a Rebuttable Presumption** of joint physical custody and equal parenting with 50:50 residence as the starting point. This can be rebutted on the basis of proven mitigating circumstances.
5. **Marriage & Relationship Training** – to establish a continuum of formal education and training and support mechanisms across personal relationships from early childhood to adulthood including equipping people to deal with crisis in their relationships. The starting focus of this process is that we look at the marriage/relationship breakdown processes.
6. **Child Support Scheme Reform** – to replace or modify the current Child Support Scheme with a fairer, more equitable and flexible family support arrangement. Investigate the fundamental premise of the CSA.
7. **Funding for Fatherhood Services** – to obtain funding to establish a national information exchange focused on fatherhood services, programs and resources.

8. Media & Community Partnerships – to encourage, at the grass roots level, individuals and organisations to promote a positive image of fatherhood utilising media and community partnerships. This will require long term national coordination.

9. Positive Education on Fatherhood – to review all curriculum approaches/materials used in all schools and teaching/training institutions to ensure that they present positive fathering images.

10. Tax Deductibility for Fatherhood Support Groups

a. to petition the Government to provide tax deductibility for non-profit charitable organisations that are carrying out preventive & support programs educating men and boys in fathering and fatherhood.

b. to establish Australian Fatherhood Initiative as a tax deductible trust to support programs for mentoring men & boys in fathering and fatherhood

11. Increase Level of Male Teachers - Each state education body to have a target of 40% male teachers in each government school and childcare centre by 2010.

12. Prioritise Men's Health & Wellbeing Services – to provide specific health and wellbeing services appropriate to men and fathers.

13. Education Services for Men's Health & Wellbeing – to establish early intervention and education programs to promote men's health and wellbeing.

14. Policy, Planning & Practice

We commend the Australian governments and all members of parliament for taking leadership with initiatives that support and strengthen families.

We recommend that knowledge and understanding from programs such as Men and Family relationships be used to influence policy, planning and practice in mainstream services.

Personal commendation and recommendation from NSCF Delegates to Parliamentarians

We would commend the parliamentarians for their service and sacrifice for the people of Australia and recommend that they take one extra day a month off to spend with their families. This could be called the parliamentarians' family day and could be a way of encouraging other high pressure professions to do the same.

Appendix 2: Contacts

Key Leaders/Contacts, Men's/Father's Family-Friendly Policy Forum Delegates 20th June 2007

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