Engaging with fathers in practice – challenges, achievements, and lessons learnt

‘Just for Dad’s is a pioneering initiative developed by practitioners in Springboard, Knocknaheeny in Cork, in conjunction with the school of Applied Social Studies, UCC, aimed at engaging with fathers around developing relationships with their children. The programme was conceived out of an awareness gained through practice, research and experience of the limitations and challenges of effectively engaging men in family support services. It has consisted of a twelve week group work programme which highlights how important dads are to their children’s development and during which fathers have explored topics such as ‘Building relationships with children’, ‘What about discipline?’, ‘Positive well-being’ and The benefits of having a positive relationship with the children’s mother’. Over the course of a year, the initiative is been developed, implemented and independently evaluated. This paper will outline the course of this journey so far, highlighting the lessons learnt, practice insights gained, and research findings from the evaluation process.