

‘BRINGING YOUR DAD TO...’ events in Sharrow Community
September 8th/9th 2007
Evaluation by Steve Smallman

September 8th

The session was held in the Sheffield United Study Support Room which, once you got to it up the fairly steep stairs proved to be an ideal venue. It easily accommodated the number of Dads and their children who attended and the facilities were excellent. There was a relaxed, intimate atmosphere and the dads seemed to enjoy the story sessions as much as their children. They all joined in with the drawing session and it was great to see the way they interacted with their children and with each other. The children were delightful and even the youngest ones stayed relatively happy and engaged for the whole session. The ongoing supply of drinks and biscuits was probably a key factor in this. The stories seemed to be about at the right level, not too babyish for the 5-6 year olds, humourous enough to keep the Dads engaged and short and colourful enough for the little ones to enjoy looking at. The drawing session was equally ‘all encompassing’ as the toddlers enjoyed an artistic scribbling session while the older children and their dads had go at drawing the facial expressions.

In my opinion this event went really well and was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone (me included) who attended.

We were fortunate that none of the children needed the loo too urgently as it was quite a long way to the toilets from the room.

I thought the stairs might be an issue for the Dads with children in buggies but nobody seemed to find it a problem at all.

It would have been helpful to have had more copies of the books being read so the youngest children could have looked at the pictures and turned the pages whilst sitting with their dads.

The mix of stories, drawing demos and drawing activities worked well as it kept even the littlest children engaged.

September 9th

The morning session was held at Highfield Library which felt very welcoming and despite being a large room had a comfortable and intimate atmosphere. After a slow start, which may well have been due to the Great Yorkshire Race starting up outside, the room soon filled up with dads and their children and indeed more and more kept arriving as we went along. Again, it was great to see how involved the dads were and how readily they participated in the activities. I was a bit concerned that there wouldn’t be enough room for everybody to take part but it wasn’t a problem. Everyone found a space and almost everyone had a go! There was a real buzz about the place and a tremendous sense of community at the event. Everyone seemed to

enjoy themselves and the provision of a delicious buffet added to the 'party' atmosphere. I was able, during the food/drawing section, to chat to several of the dads and to give some additional drawing tips to some of the more enthusiastic ones. I also did a little 'one to one' work with a couple of the older children.

Almost all of the children stayed engaged throughout the session and because the atmosphere was so relaxed the occasional bouncy toddler wasn't a problem. Having several copies of the books was a big help.

I think that this event was a resounding success. The advanced publicity had obviously worked well and the library was an ideal venue providing a comfortable, safe and family friendly environment. The staff from the Library, Bookstart and Consilient consulting worked in conjunction to run a well organised and thoroughly enjoyable event. I was impressed by the commitment and enthusiasm of everyone involved.

The afternoon session at Abbeydale Primary School didn't attract very many people which was disappointing after the success of the morning one. At first only one dad had come, fortunately with four children, with another two dads arriving later. The session was therefore a fairly quiet affair. However, the dads and their children seemed to enjoy themselves and happily joined in with the activities. On reflection I feel that perhaps it was the venue that didn't work. It may be the case that people are less inclined to go to an event in a school at the weekend when they are probably there on every weekday already.

In conclusion, I think that the 'Bring your Dad to...' events in Sharrow were a very worthwhile exercise and it was a pleasure to see so many dads interacting in such a fun and positive way with their children. I was delighted to be involved.