

New Beginnings Father Involvement Program (Abby Dads)

Final Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Father Involvement Programming (FIP; commonly referred to as *Abby Dads*) was established in 1995 to support the fathers of pregnant or parenting female adolescents attending New Beginnings. To meet the needs of an increased range and variety of participating fathers and children, Abby Dads has steadily expanded the number of services offered.

In 2007, Abbotsford Community Services (ACS) successfully applied to the Vancouver Foundation to fund a three-year project that included an external evaluation of the Father Involvement Program.

Abby Dads implemented the ACS Client Tracking System in 2009, and as a result, keeping up to date is more efficient, the data are more likely to be accurate, and staff can more easily follow individual fathers.

The pattern of increasing numbers of participating fathers has continued throughout the three-year evaluation period, and is due to increasing recruitment, despite declining retention.

The most striking increase in individual supports has been the number of brief community contacts, mostly about family justice. Two additional levels of Anger Awareness workshops have been added. Fathers involved in Best for Babies increased from four to 68 in five years, largely attributable to Abby Dads staff co-facilitation. Hockey and My Daddy and Me have stable numbers, being mature programs. Dads and Kids at Play continues to grow.

Abby Dads's primary aim is to help men identify with the role of father, by being part of a community of fathers. Building a father identity is a prerequisite for positive parenting and spousal relationships.

As part of an assessment of program impacts, 39 father interviews were conducted, including six fathers interviewed twice. Fathers' achievements within Abby Dads closely matched their

goals, which most often were to improve connections with other fathers, become better parents, and deal with anger and stress. The most common unrealized goal was not yet achieving custody of their children.

The interpersonal aspects of Abby Dads that are its greatest strength – the supportive and knowledgeable staff, and the connections made with other fathers. Both fathers and their partners agreed on these strengths. The most common suggested improvements by fathers were to offer more activities for longer periods, and to advertise Abby Dads activities more widely in the community. Partners hoped for more couples-oriented Abby Dads programming.

Two South Asian part-time resource workers were hired in 2009. A successful program of swimming lessons for South Asian fathers and children was established at Matsqui Recreation Centre, where Abby Dads provided a subsidy as an incentive. Without additional funding, these two support workers' jobs will end in the fall of 2010.

Seven Family Justice seminars have been held from November 2007 to February 2010. In these sessions, attendees rotate in small groups through tables each headed by a different family justice professional, who answers attendees' questions. There have been 200 attendees in total – most from the general community, about twice as many men as women. Satisfaction with the seminars was high for both attendees and professionals alike; almost all of the participants came away with at least some of the sought-after answers. Currently, a significant proportion of telephone calls to Abby Dads relate to family justice issues.

Another new priority activity in the past three years has been Dads and Kids at Play (DKAP), a recreation program for fathers and their children aged 5 to 12, offered in partnership with Abbotsford Parks & Recreation. DKAP has grown steadily, with about two dozen fathers and children who participate at least occasionally. This program is a good candidate to test out a proxy model where Abby Dads support workers, rather than staffing the activity, provide

training to Parks & Recreation staff on being father-centred. This model is being considered as a way to expand Abby Dads outreach within the bounds of staff funding.

Promotional activities have been used to improve the participation of single and part-time fathers. These have taken the form of a revised Abby Dads brochure, which has been distributed widely, and making more frequent contact with staff from the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

A weekly fathers' support group called Dads Unlimited was formed in March 2009, as part of the Abby Dads philosophy of creating a community of fathers. This program attracted a small core of regular participants. Starting in the spring of 2010, this activity was shifted to a third level of Anger Awareness workshop, focusing on collective approaches to anger issues.

Abby Dads has an official website (www.abbydads.ca), an organizational Facebook page, and a personal Facebook page for each support worker. The website has about 560 visits per month. To be more effective as a recruitment tool, the website entry page should have more information about the program.

Sustainability is an issue for all father involvement programs in the province, as almost all rely on piecing together various funding sources. In the current era of fiscal restraint, father involvement programs have been discontinued in some communities. For Abby Dads, there are several essential elements necessary for long-term sustainability:

- a focus on fathers with child custody or access issues, and fathers with higher risk profiles
- offering Family Justice seminars to the general community
- maintaining and improving community visibility and connections
- remaining true to the Abby Dads logic model and associated philosophy of mentoring men as fathers

The end of short-term funding by the Vancouver Foundation, the Law Foundation of B.C., and Success by Six, as well as reduced funding to ACS from MCFD, has compelled Abby Dads to look for ways to best continue to provide the activities of the last three years. Prioritizing

administrative time for seeking out and apply for new funding will be helpful in restoring resources to recent levels. In the meantime, various strategies are being considered, including curtailing lower-priority activities, reducing activity hours, and shifting to a proxy model of program delivery for activities offered together with community partners.

The report ends with nine recommendations for Abby Dads' improvement and continued success.

1. *In economically difficult times, prioritize administrative attention for seeking and responding to available funding opportunities.*
2. *Increase the proportion of Abby Dads staff hours dedicated to supervisory responsibilities, and work on a new supervisory model that emphasizes Abby Dads' autonomy from New Beginnings.*
3. *Assign a high priority to fundraising efforts specifically to retain one or both South Asian Resource Workers*
4. *Consider nominal fees for some activities and/or fathers.*
5. *Reinforce and build on successful community partnerships in the past three years, starting with Abbotsford Parks & Recreation.*
6. *Consider using more volunteers to help in the delivery of open group programming.*
7. *Look within ACS to share program responsibilities, where appropriate.*
8. *Optimize the online visibility of Abby Dads using the abbydads.ca website and Facebook*

9. *As Abby Dads evolves, maintain an unwavering focus on its philosophy of hands-on mentoring.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Brief Program History and Description

Father Involvement Programming (FIP; to be referred by its everyday name *Abby Dads* henceforth) is one component of the New Beginnings program offered by Abbotsford Community Services (ACS). Abby Dads was established in 1995 with the specific and limited mandate to support the fathers of pregnant or parenting female adolescents attending the New Beginnings high school classroom. In the beginning, essentially all of the fathers were under 25 and their children were under six years old.

Young Abbotsford fathers who have children not yet in school remains the priority demographic group for Abby Dads. However, the official mandate has twice been expanded in the last 10 years: first to remove the restriction on fathers' age, and most recently to allow the participation of fathers with children of any age. Thus, as it is stated in the current Abby Dads brochure, Abby Dads is available to "any man who is expecting, who is a Dad, or who is called 'Dad'." The need to consider an expanded mandate was initially motivated by the natural aging process of Abby Dads participants: a number of fathers wished to continue their participation (and/or their children's participation) despite becoming too old for the program. The current universal approach to Abby Dads, once motivated by the support needs of aging fathers and children, is now grounded in a well-articulated (but mostly unwritten) philosophy about how best to support fathers in general. The most recent annual report demonstrates how far Abby Dads has evolved from its initial mandate. Only about 25% of fathers served by the program in 2008/09 were under age 25.

To meet the needs of an increased range and variety of participating fathers and children, Abby Dads has steadily expanded the number of services offered. Currently, Abby Dads offers the following fathers-only services: individual support, Nobody's Perfect parenting skills sessions, weekly ball hockey, anger awareness workshops at two levels, and a support

group called Dads Unlimited that is transitioning into a level-three anger awareness workshop. For fathers together with their children, there is male co-facilitation of Best for Babies (a high-risk pre-and post-natal program), a Saturday breakfast playgroup for fathers with children aged 0 to 6, and a weekly recreation program for fathers with school age children up to age 12. For community families in general, Abby Dads organizes and runs quarterly Family Justice seminars and an annual Father's Day event.

1.2 Opportunity for Independent Evaluation

Abbotsford Community Services successfully applied to the Vancouver Foundation to fund a three-year project with four goals:

1. Increased connections between fathers and their children aged 0 to 10 years, with particular emphasis on single fathers, part-time fathers, and South Asian-identified fathers.
2. Increased connections between fathers to reduce father isolation.
3. Increased community inclusiveness of fathers.
4. To conduct an external evaluation of the Father Involvement Program, with the results disseminated to interested BC communities.

1.3 Evaluation Purposes

In the funding proposal, the fourth goal (the external evaluation) listed three objectives:

1. To develop a steering committee to guide the evaluation process, with membership to include representatives of the ACS Early Childhood and Family Resource department, the supervisor of New Beginnings, FIN-BC, the BC Council for Families, and the external evaluators for the project (Barry Forer, Iraj Poureslami and Nerida Bullock).
2. To develop a formative and summative evaluation plan based on the current logic model and the Father Involvement Program plan.

3. To document the evaluation findings in an accessible manner for other groups interested in fathering programs. To disseminate the findings through five provincial and/or pan-Canadian conference presentations.

1.4 Evaluation Components and Timelines

With the guidance of the steering committee, a three-year evaluation workplan and timetable was developed and approved. The evaluation workplan was divided into six components, each with several subcomponents. Each is briefly described below.

The first component was a formative evaluation of program processes, and focused on documentation processes, the recruitment and retention of fathers, program components and linkages between them, and human resource issues. The second component was a summative evaluation of the impacts of the Father Involvement program, particularly on the fathers themselves, but also on their partners, and potentially on their children. The evaluation of impacts on fathers was based on assessing fathers before and after participation in the program, with careful consideration of other factors that could weaken the attribution of changes to the effect of the program. Impact on fathers was considered quite broadly, encompassing aspects such as reaching (or progressing towards) agreed-upon goals with regards to such things as: involvement with children, involvement with mothers, reduced isolation, reduced risk factors, and increased feelings of self-efficacy. Since fathers participate in the program with differing intensity and patterns of involvement, impact assessment tried to take this wide diversity into account as much as possible.

The third component of the evaluation involved a feasibility study for the development of increased participation of Indo-Canadian fathers in the program, followed by a process evaluation of the development of the program (should it be assessed as feasible), with the possibility (though unlikely) of the beginnings of a summative assessment of the implemented

program by the end of the third year of the evaluation. The results of this feasibility assessment are written up in a separate report.

The fourth component was an evaluation of the new aspects of programming that were described in the project goals, as well as those already in the planning or early implementation stages at the start of the project. Four programming aspects were included in this evaluation: the Family Justice seminars, involvement of fathers with children from age 6 to 10, involvement of single and part-time fathers, and the abbydads.ca website.

The fifth evaluation component was a study of how to optimize program sustainability, through an assessment of funding structures, community networking, administration practices, and general community perceptions about the importance of father involvement. The sixth component was to devise a dissemination plan for the results.

2. Evaluation Methods

2.1 General Strategy

For each year of the evaluation, a work plan and timetable were developed over the summer, based on the overall three-year work plan and timetable. These would then be presented in September to the Abby Dads Supervisor and the Manager for Early Childhood and Family Resources. After some discussion and necessary adjustments, the yearly plans were approved and the work for that year was begun.

Unlike some evaluations that take a strongly positivist approach to studying and drawing conclusions about a program, the strategic orientation of this evaluation was primarily interactionist and qualitative. Specifically, to the extent possible, information was gathered in a semi-structured interview format. Interview topics were typically pre-determined, but within this structure, interviewer and interviewee jointly guided the conversations to the elements deemed most pertinent to these topics at hand. Often, this pursuit of pertinence required the exploration of unanticipated topics. As part of the process, the evaluator/interviewer challenged assumptions, expressed tentative conclusions, and generally supported the interactionist mode of meaning-making. Some interviews (e.g., with fathers) were a little more structured, in the interests of time, maximizing the number of fathers interviewed, and awareness of the sensitive nature of some of the questions. Father interviews were the only time when the evaluation included any strictly quantitative questions.

2.2 Data Sources

In the evaluation, data were collected from a variety of sources including:

- Abby Dads documents, including annual and quarterly reports going back to 2004, forms for the various activities (intake, activity sheets, waiver of liability, individual service

plans, etc.), the Policies and Procedure Manual for Father Involvement Programming, the Program Logic Model, Results of Participant Feedback for a variety of Abby Dads activities, newspaper clippings, and completed ISP forms.

- Regular individual and group interviews with the ACS Manager for Early Childhood and Family Resources, the Program Supervisor, the Father Support and Resource Workers (including the South Asian Resource Workers), and the Fathers' Food Coordinator.
- Individual interviews with 39 fathers who were actively participating in Abby Dads, including repeat interviews with six fathers.
- Focus group participation of 7 partners of fathers actively participating in Abby Dads.
- Individual and group interviews with staff at a variety of social service agencies offering services to Indo-Canadian families.
- Individual telephone interviews with coordinators of other father involvement programs in British Columbia, and with the Coordinator of the Father Involvement Network for BC.
- Observation of participants at recreational ball hockey, Family Justice seminars, Celebrating Dads Father's Day events, My Daddy and Me breakfast playgroups, and Dads and Kids at Play recreational activities for fathers and their school-age children. The more sensitive group activities, such as Anger Awareness workshops and the Dads Unlimited support group, were purposely not observed.
- Review of literature relating to multicultural fathering and the measuring father involvement.
- Analysis of usage statistics for the www.abbydads.ca website.
- Analysis of 2001 and 2006 Census data relating to visible minority trends in Abbotsford.

2.3 Limitations

a. Measuring the Impact of Abby Dads on Fathers

One of the primary thrusts for funding an Abby Dads evaluation was to provide an opportunity to systematically measure something about the immediate and short-term impacts of the program, particularly on the fathers themselves. Any potential positive impacts of the program on the children and families of participating fathers are assumed to be a direct consequence of successful outcomes for the father. The impact of the program on encouraging father-friendly agencies, institutions, and communities, on the other hand, may be unrelated or only indirectly related to the impact on the father participants themselves.

Designing an internally valid study on the impacts of Abby Dads was very challenging. There are many components of the program, and fathers may participate in just one, or all of them. There is also great variability in the number of times that fathers participate, from playing hockey once to receiving many sessions of individual support to deal with an acute life issue. Therefore, the intensity of participation is both extremely variable and multidimensional. Even if a defensible “Abby Dads dosage” formula could have been created, there was no available comparison group against which to objectively assess the impact of the program. The fathers themselves must act as their own comparison group, with the outcomes measured over time, ideally at the start of the program and at some natural endpoint. This design is called a one-group pretest-posttest design, and is regarded as weak, given that changes over time may be due to other factors besides the program, such as maturation, other events or interventions at the same time as the program, familiarity with the measurement tools, or even regression towards the mean. On the bright side, selection biases are not an issue, as long as the same participants are evaluated both times.

In addition to varying intensity of participation, and inferential issues, the reliability and validity of the measurement tools were also a challenge. Ideally, impacts would have been

measured using direct observation (where appropriate), using well-established tools. However, for a whole host of reasons (mostly about time, cost, and ethical concerns), self-report was chosen as the most appropriate way to measure impacts. After discussion with program staff, it was also decided that the data from these measures would be gathered using face-to-face personal interviews, rather than self-completed questionnaires. Interviews have several important advantages over questionnaires that are particularly relevant to this evaluation, including higher completion rates, the ability to clarify questions or ask for additional information, and the ability to capture non-verbal information. Of course, there are also disadvantages including the time necessary to conduct individual interviews, and the possibility that fathers may be less candid in such a personal setting.

In this messy real-world setting of Abby Dads evaluation, employing a triangulation approach was the key to maximizing the strength of the inferences. Consistency about the impact of the program across multiple data sources (e.g., fathers, mothers, Abby Dads staff, other agency staff) provided the principal gauge for making any causal claims. Therefore, the triangulation approach was embraced for the summative evaluation. Also, given the importance of creating a defensible process for conducting a summative evaluation of such a complicated program, Year 1 of the evaluation was dedicated to piloting the father interview process, with Years 2 and 3 devoted to collecting real “pretest and posttest” data.

The original evaluation plan to interview all fathers twice (once near the beginning of their participation, and again about a year later) proved to be short-sighted and logistically unrealistic. The plan was short-sighted because it didn’t address the critical contributions of fathers who already had relatively long-term involvement with Abby Dads at the start of the evaluation. It was decided early in the evaluation process to include these veteran participants, some of whom had been involved for more than three years. This group of fathers were unique in having: a) an in-depth understanding of Abby Dads, b) a sense of how programming has evolved in recent years, and c) experience in both receiving and providing support in group

activities. About one-third of fathers interviewed for the evaluation were those with two or more years of involvement with Abby Dads.

The plan was logistically unrealistic for two main reasons: first, there is no set time for new intake, and second, most new participants are no longer involved in Abby Dads one year after their initial participation. Unlike most traditional social service programs, fathers enter Abby Dads via a number of different activities, and partake in as many activities as desired for as long as desire or circumstances permit. Fathers' continued participation is always welcomed by the staff, but there is no official expectation around regular attendance (except for activities, such as Anger Awareness, where certificates are awarded for completion). The pattern of fathers' attendance over the past few years reflects this drop-in/drop-out policy. While the number of participating fathers has increased dramatically (from 96 in 2004/05 to 296 in 2008/09), the percentage of fathers carrying over their participation from one year to the next has dropped (from 35% in 2006/07 to 19% in 2007/08; not reported in 2008/09). The unrealistic logistic challenge, therefore, was to identify new participants who would be involved with Abby Dads for long enough, and intensely enough, to have expectations of program impact. A large proportion of the fathers who were interviewed in Year 2 of the evaluation could not be re-interviewed, mostly due to not being reachable or declining the second interview.

b. Concerns About Impact on Father Participation

As mentioned earlier, the evaluation was designed to emphasize a collaborative, qualitative approach towards gaining a deeper understanding and appreciation of the program, rather than having the evaluators relying mainly on objective measures. The downside of this approach is that fathers (even with their consent) were subjected in the interviews to a more personal and potentially sensitive examination of the circumstances of their Abby Dads involvement (and lives) than would otherwise have been the case. Abby Dads staff, knowing the challenges faced by many of the fathers, were rightly concerned that the evaluation process might prove upsetting to some, and could undermine the trust that had been so carefully

accrued, or perhaps even cause a disruption in their Abby Dads participation. Their concerns were heightened when one regular participant stopped coming to the program shortly after his interview.

The potential existence of this worrisome effect was tested in the fall of 2008, at the beginning of the “live” father interviews. A list of 16 new participants was compiled, and then randomly split into two groups of eight. One group took part in pretest interviews, while the other group were (temporarily) excluded. The ongoing participation of the two groups was then compared. While this test was not significant in any statistical sense, it did give some indication about unintended consequences of evaluation activities. There did not seem to be any negative (or positive) effect of being interviewed, based on the participation rates of those doing the pretest interviews and their non-interviewed counterparts. As a result, the interviews continued to be arranged without concern about these consequences. In the end, the one father who had stopped participating resumed his involvement. It turned out that his hiatus was unrelated to being interviewed.

There were other aspects of the evaluation about which Abby Dads staff expressed concerns about potential negative effects on fathers and their participation. Primary among these concerns was the task of gathering information about the impact of Abby Dads from the partners and ex-partners of the fathers. This information was universally recognized as a crucial part of trying to draw strong conclusions by triangulating across data sources. However, this was a conflict for staff, who felt that their primary obligation was to the individual fathers. After rejecting untenable suggestions such as getting father consent for partner participation, and ensuring that questions were focused completely on the program rather than on the fathers themselves, this information was eventually gathered through a focus group.

3. Findings

3.1 Program processes

Please refer to the report from the first year of the evaluation (see Appendix E) for detailed descriptions about program processes as of the summer of 2008. This report updates each of the sections on program processes.

a. Documentation

As Abby Dads has continued to grow, both in the number of participants and the number of activities offered, the documentation necessary to keep track has also needed to evolve. For each new activity (e.g., Dads and Kids at Play), new waiver, attendance, and evaluation forms have been created and regularly completed. Even with the increasing burden of documentation each year, staff have been diligent in recording data needed to summarize the program's intended outcomes as defined in the Abby Dads logic model. Each quarter, and in an annual report, the Abby Dads Supervisor puts together the program usage statistics, which include participant demographics and usage across all Abby Dads activities (each of which is tied to a programming objective and overall program goal).

Until the fall of 2009, these program data were recorded by staff into Excel, using templates that were adequate for basic reporting, but not very sophisticated in their design. As Abby Dads participation rates have increased, keeping current with the data has been increasingly challenging. In addition, there was limited ability to track individual participant's participation across activities. To meet this challenge, in September 2009 Abby Dads implemented the ACS Client Tracking System. This is the official database system for ACS, and has been rolled out one program at a time over the past few years. Now that Abby Dads staff are using a powerful customized database system, keeping up to date is more efficient, the data are more likely to be accurate, and staff can more easily follow individual fathers. Abby Dads Staff report a high level of satisfaction with the new tracking system.

b. Recruitment and retention

The pattern of increasing numbers of participating fathers has continued throughout the three-year evaluation period (and before that as well). By the end of the third quarter (March 31, 2010) of the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2010, there were already 309 participants in Abby Dads. This compares to 296 for the whole 2008/09 fiscal year and 93 for the 2006/07 fiscal year. As discussed in the Year 1 evaluation report, this continued increase is due to increasing recruitment, despite declining retention.

Recruitment continues to be fuelled by a number of factors, including: fewer restrictions on the age of fathers and children who can attend Abby Dads programs, the addition of new activities, the addition of two South Asian resource workers, and fathers attending Best for Babies. The Dads and Kids at Play program now allows fathers with children age 6 to 10 to participate. Four new Family Justice seminars are held each year, each with about 30 participants, mostly fathers. The recent establishment of swimming lessons for South Asian fathers has the potential to bring many other families into Abby Dads programming. In 2004/05, four Abby Dads participants came from Best for Babies, compared to 68 through the first three quarters of 2009/10; all due to Abby Dads staff co-facilitation of that program.

The philosophy of father-initiated participation and length of retention continues. This means that for staff, retention is not an overt goal. Now that the program has grown so rapidly, it has reached the point where additional recruitment-friendly activities (or even maintaining current activities) may start having a negative impact on the ability of staff to provide the same levels of direct service. This potential impact has come to the fore in the current funding year, as staff hours have been reduced in response to reductions in program funding. The implications of this for program delivery will be discussed later in this report, in the section on sustainability.

c. Program components and outputs

The logic model for Abby Dads (last published in the 2007/08 Annual Report) shows how each of the major components of the program (individual support, closed group programming, and open group programming) relate to particular implementation objectives, measured outputs, linking constructs, and short- and long-term expected outcomes. Over the three years of the evaluation, the particular activities within each component have not remained completely static; they have evolved to the extent that priorities for new programming and funding opportunities have intersected.

The individual support component includes contact time with individual fathers, a count of brief contacts from the community, and the number of fathers being provided with individualized support. Hours of contact with individual fathers has remained relatively constant since 2005/06. The number of fathers receiving formal support has roughly doubled. The most striking change has been the number of brief community contacts, which have grown from 27 in 2006/07 (first year tracked) to 214 in the current fiscal year. This increase is mostly due to contacts about family justice, though it also reflects greater general visibility of Abby Dads in the community and better tracking processes.

Closed group programming refers to father-centred curriculum-based activities, and includes Welcome Baby, Best for Babies, Nobody's Perfect, Anger Awareness, Money Skills and Food Skills for Families. The financial and nutrition skills courses are examples of programming that is occasionally offered when an opportunity arises locally. A second level of Anger Awareness workshop was developed, both to take advantage of new expertise (from the part-time support worker, and a family therapist) and to meet the needs of a number of fathers who had taken the first level and wanted to make further progress. The additional level of Anger Awareness training resulted in an increase in the number of fathers involved, compared to previous years. A third level has recently been developed and taught for the first time. It acts as a replacement for a fathers-only drop-in support group (Dads Unlimited) that needed a focus.

The number of fathers involved in Best for Babies increased from four in 2004/05 to 68 in 2009/10, with the greatest gains in the past three years when Abby Dads staff began to co-facilitate the program. Father attendance at Welcome Baby and Nobody's Perfect has fluctuated over time. In the current year, attendance has been low, perhaps related to competition from other activities for Abby Dads staff time.

Open group programming refers to social and recreational programming (hockey, camping/canoeing, and softball), father and child play-based programming (My Daddy and Me, Dads and Kids at Play, and swimming lessons for South Asian families), and Family Justice sessions. Hockey and My Daddy and Me are both mature Abby Dads activities, and their stable-over-time participation numbers reflect this. Dads and Kids at Play, which is for fathers and their children aged 6 to 10, has doubled the number of participants in the two years it has been running. Camping/canoeing and softball have attracted similar numbers each year (but are not offered every year). The swimming lessons for South Asian fathers and children just started in the spring of 2010; its continuation into the future may be limited, as the funding for the South Asian resource workers runs out by the fall of 2010. Attempts to start other open-group programming for South Asian families, such as a movie night and floor hockey, have been unsuccessful. Family Justice sessions, which are open to all community members, seems to have fluctuating participation, both in terms of overall numbers and the proportion of fathers. The September 2009 session was cancelled due to lower than usual interest, which may be an indication that fewer sessions per year may meet the community need adequately. The termination of Law Foundation of BC funding for Family Justice sessions may also argue for having fewer sessions going forward.

d. Program linkages and philosophy

The Abby Dads program logic model emphasizes the importance of weaving together group activities and individual support within father involvement programs. Regardless of whether the entry point into the program is through a group or an individual component, fathers' ongoing participation is a function of how consistently well the program creates a feeling of connection and belonging. Some fathers make a strong individual connection with a Abby Dads support worker, and may never participate in any group activities. More often, however, fathers connect through group activities such as sports and recreation (with or without their children). Thus, the most efficient way to help the greatest number of fathers is to emphasize group programming.

Abby Dads group activities also provide the best opportunities for participants to achieve Abby Dads's primary aim – to help them learn what it means for a man to identify with the role of father, by being part of a community of fathers. Building a father identity, according to Abby Dads philosophy, is a prerequisite for other positive life changes, whether in terms of parenting, spousal relationships or thriving generally. The version of the program logic model portrayed in the 2007/08 Annual Report does not overtly include father identity formation as either a linking construct or short-term outcome of the program. After discussion of this potential omission with all Abby Dads staff in the fall of 2008, it was decided to add this into the logic model.

The logic model also makes clear that ultimately, the success of Abby Dads should be measured in terms of healthy and active father-child relationships and healthy development of the children. A summative evaluation of Abby Dads would need to address the extent of father identity formation attributable to the program, and whether that was associated with improved outcomes for fathers, for father-child relationships, and for the children. Such an evaluation would require a longer time frame than was available in this study.

e. Human resource issues

When the evaluation began in the fall of 2007, there were two full-time Abby Dads staff. The more qualified and experienced staff person took the role of Father Support Worker. This involved facilitating some group activities, and responsibility for all of the individual support, both formal and informal. The relatively-inexperienced other staff member took the role of Father Resource Worker, with responsibility for group activities only. As described in the Year 1 Evaluation Report (see Appendix E), this necessary division of labour was problematic since different fathers would establish rapport with one staff member or the other, but only one could provide individual support.

Late in 2007, the Resource Worker left the program, and was replaced (in a 0.65 FTE capacity) by someone with more experience and education, particularly in the areas of addiction and anger management. With a more qualified and experienced second staff member, it was possible to move to a new responsibility-sharing model where both Abby Dads staff members have the freedom to take on group and individual support responsibilities. Fathers with individual support needs now had a choice of support workers, as the full-time staff member who could now share the more intensive individual support work with the other staff, and the new staff member could use his skill areas with individuals or groups as appropriate.

In the past two and a half years, these two support workers have worked well together. It is now more of an equal co-worker model, with responsibilities largely divided along lines of expertise and experience. Given the increase in the number of activities offered compared to the past, it is increasingly rare for support workers to staff a group activity together. Therefore, there is less need to coordinate, and more opportunity to work independently. Of course, there are regular staff meetings where various aspects of the program are discussed, and any concerns can be aired.

The two support workers complement one another in how each emphasizes individual vs. group support for fathers. While each provides both types of support, one staff member spends more informal support time with a variety of individual fathers compared to the other staff member. Thus, two complementary types of potential benefits are available to Abby Dads participants - connecting meaningfully on an individual level, and connecting with a support group of your peers. Both types of connections are consistent with the Abby Dads philosophy of mentoring men to identify as fathers.

One human resource-related idea that was being considered in the first year of the evaluation was asking the senior Father Support Worker to consider taking on the supervisory role for Abby Dads, which is now part of the New Beginnings Supervisor's job responsibilities. The resulting greater independence of Abby Dads could have the salutary effect of helping funders understand the direct benefits of father involvement programming, which could enhance the sustainability of Abby Dads in the future. Up until the present, there has been no movement towards realizing this idea.

3.2 Self-Reported Impacts of the Program

a. Father Interviews - Introduction

Altogether, there were a total of 39 interviews conducted with 33 fathers; six fathers were interviewed twice. Fathers who were new to the program (i.e., involved for less than three months) were interviewed using the Pretest Interview form, while those with more experience with Abby Dads were interviewed using the Posttest Interview form, even for their first interview. The Posttest Interview form can be found in Appendix A. It is identical to the Pretest form, except for the omission of items on program strengths, weaknesses, and impact that were not yet applicable to these new participants. The Pretest form was designed to provide baseline measures for demographics, Abby Dads involvement, goals and anticipated benefits,

engagement with their children, fathering perceptions, interactions with partner, and connectedness to the community.

One hour was allocated for each interview. This proved adequate for the pretest interviews, but more challenging to complete for posttest interviews, especially for fathers who were most engaged in the interview process. As the evaluation was designed to optimize interaction and shared meaning, the loss of information for some interviews due to time constraints was felt to be compensated for by the quality of the information that was collected.

b. Demographics of Interviewed Fathers

Tables 1 to 3 below summarize the age, education, and employment characteristics of the 33 fathers at the time of their first interview. The distribution of father ages (Table 1) shows both the historical and continuing priority to serve young fathers (58% of the sample was under 30 years old) and the current openness to fathers of all ages. Educational attainment (Table 2) also demonstrates the diversity of program participants. For a program originally designed for young fathers, many of whom dealing with a variety of risk factors, it is perhaps a surprise that one-quarter of those interviewed had a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree. Employment/student status at the time of the first interview is shown in Table 3. About two-thirds of the fathers were working, typically full-time, while 21% were looking for work. Abby Dads staff, when viewing an earlier version of these results from 2009, asserted that a number of fathers in the program had become unemployed since the interviews, due to the economic recession. Thus, these employment results are not reflective of current reality. The six fathers who were interviewed twice provide some evidence of the unstable nature of employment for Abby Dads participants. Three of the six had become unemployed between the two interviews.

Table 1. Age of Interviewed Fathers When First Interviewed

Age Group	Number	Percent
Under 20	4	12
20 to 24	8	24
25 to 29	7	21
30 to 34	4	12
35 to 39	4	12
40 to 44	4	12
45 or older	2	6

Table 2. Highest Education

Education	Number	Percent
Some high school	6	18
High school grad	10	30
Trade or vocational school	3	9
Some college or university	6	18
College certificate or diploma	2	6
University degree or higher	6	18

Table 3 Employment/Student Status When First Interviewed

Employment/Student Status	Number	Percent
Work full-time	19	58
Work part-time	3	9
Student	4	12
Unemployed, looking for work	7	21
Unemployed, not looking for work	3	9

Note: multiple response item

c. Family Characteristics of Interviewed Fathers

Tables 4 to 6 summarize the number and ages of children, and household membership. Fathers reported up to five children, though 80% had one or two children (see Table 4). Table 5 shows that almost 60% of the children were under three years old. Together, this tendency towards having one or two, mostly quite young, children points to the emphasis of Abby Dads on helping new fathers learn what it means to be a “dad.” The summary of household membership (Table 6) gives a hint as to the issues of relationship breakdown and child custody that many of the participating fathers confront. Only half live with all of their children, and 30%

do not share a home with a spouse or partner. These percents reflect the reality that the lone fathers rarely have custody of their children, and even when the father-mother relationship is intact, children sometimes are being cared for by others (other family members, or foster parents).

Table 4. Number of Children When First Interviewed

Number of Children	Number	Percent
0	1	4
1	10	42
2	9	38
3	2	8
4	1	4
5	1	4

Table 5. Ages of Children When First Interviewed

Age in Years	Number	Percent of Children
0	11	20
1	10	18
2	11	20
3	5	9
4	4	7
5	4	7
6	2	4
7 or older	8	15

Table 6. Household Members When First Interviewed

Member	Number	Percent
Living alone	3	9
All of my children	17	52
Some of my children	2	6
Partner/spouse	23	70
My parents	4	12
Other family members	5	15
Other	2	6

Note: multiple response item

d. Initial Contact, Length and Types of Abby Dads Experience of Interviewed Fathers

The most common ways in which interviewed fathers initially found out about Abby Dads were: Best for Babies (co-facilitated by Abby Dads staff), referrals or suggestions by professionals (including high school counsellors, Life Skills workers, and Ministry for Children and Family Development staff), from partners who were students at New Beginnings, and from friends/workers/partners not associated with the Abby Dads program. Interviewed fathers were not as likely to have learned about Abby Dads from marketing efforts, such as Abby Dads brochures, newspaper articles, the abbydads.ca website, or child development fairs.

Table 7 shows how long each father had been involved with Abby Dads at the time of the first interview. There was a good representation of new and experienced participants in the sample. Almost 60% had been involved for less than one year, while 32% had been involved for two years or longer. The original plan was to interview fathers twice, initially near the beginning of their involvement, and then about one year later. For reasons already explained in the Limitations section, this proved logistically unrealistic. In fact, of the six fathers interviewed twice, only one was initially interviewed near the start of Abby Dads involvement.

Table 7. Length of time involved with program when first interviewed

Time	Number	Percent
Under 6 months	11	35
6 months to < 1 year	7	23
1 year to < 2 years	3	10
2 years to < 3 years	5	16
3 years or more	5	16

Table 8 provides a summary of the Abby Dads activities in which interviewed fathers were engaged. It should be noted that the results relate strongly to the logistics of data collection. The evaluators relied on Abby Dads staff to arrange father interviews, including facilitating interviews by providing fathers with transportation to and from the interview sites. Thus, interview schedules tended to be tied to staff availability, and therefore tied to program

schedules, such as hockey on Monday evenings. Similarly, almost half of the interviewed fathers were participants in the Saturday breakfast playgroup. This high percentage certainly reflects the opportunity this activity provided for evaluators to interview fathers while their children were in group activities, rather than the actual proportion of Abby Dads fathers who take part in this program.

Despite the sampling biases, these patterns of participation do provide a snapshot of the diverse components of Abby Dads, and how these activities in various combinations could be helpful for fathers of all types. Looking at the top five activities only, it is clear that Abby Dads provides: help for new parents (Best for Babies), father-child activities in a social setting (My Daddy and Me), exercise and stress relief (hockey), interpersonal skills (Anger Awareness), and individualized attention when needed (informal support).

Table 8. Participation in Which Abby Dads Activities

Activity	Number	Percent
My Daddy and Me	16	48
Hockey	16	48
Informal support	16	48
Best for Babies	12	36
Anger Awareness	11	33
Formal support	7	21
Nobody's Perfect	7	21
Family Justice	6	18
Dads and Kids at Play	1	3
Other activities*	9	27

Note: multiple response item

***Other Activities:** Barbeques (4), Camping (3), Softball (3), Build-off (2), Father's Day (1)

e. Goals of Participating in Abby Dads

All interviewed fathers were asked to state the goals or anticipated benefits from participating in Abby Dads. For the fathers who had been in the program for some time already, the retrospective nature of the question makes their responses somewhat less reliable, in

comparison to new participants, to distinguish between anticipated and unanticipated benefits. With that caveat in mind, there were three commonly expressed goals, three other goals expressed by more than 10% of fathers, and a number of more father-specific goals. The top three goals were: to improve their connections (social and otherwise) with other fathers, to learn the skills necessary to be good parents, and to deal effectively with anger and stress. In the second tier of goals, some fathers were looking for help with: custody of or improved access to their children, connections to community support networks, and social opportunities for their children. Individual fathers also expressed goals around improving their personal lives, such as getting secure housing, becoming drug-free, gaining life skills, or learning to manage their finances.

f. Goal-Related Benefits Due to Participation in Abby Dads

Fathers who were in the program for more than six months were asked about the goal-related benefits that they derived from participating in Abby Dads. It is important to emphasize that this is certainly a self-selected sample, based on the assumption that those for whom the program was effective would be more likely to continue in the program than those for whom the program was ineffective. Not surprisingly, the benefits derived from Abby Dads participation mirrored the pattern of goals described above. The most commonly expressed benefits were creating new social connections with other fathers, learning how to be a better parent, and improving anger management. It is interesting that some fathers described the parenting benefit specifically in terms of learning the role of “father.” This is an indication that the Abby Dads model, which is designed to help men understand both fatherhood and parenthood, is being implemented successfully.

g. Goal-Unrelated Benefits Due to Participation in Abby Dads

There was only one main type of unintended benefit expressed by interviewed fathers – connection to other fathers. This was expressed mainly as a social benefit, but also in terms of

learning from others about fatherhood, and even for practical information such as job opportunities. Thus, connections to other fathers seemed to be a near-universal benefit to those in the program, whether or not fathers entered the program seeking to make such connections. This strongly argues for the importance of group activities in Abby Dads as a way to reduce the isolation that these fathers experience.

h. Unrealized Goals of Participating in Abby Dads

Most interviewed fathers stated that they had realized all of the goals set at the beginning of their participation in Abby Dads. It was clear from their comments that they also attributed this achievement to their Abby Dads involvement, rather than to other factors. The few fathers who had not yet achieved their stated goals fell into three categories: those seeking custody or increased access to their children, those still working on persistent anger issues, and those whose desired participation in particular Abby Dads activities was restricted by limitations of time, transportation, or the age of their children. In all of these cases, these as-yet unrealized goals were not viewed as a shortcoming of Abby Dads, but rather due to the realities of the family justice system or life circumstances. With regards to helping those with more deep-seated anger issues, Abby Dads did respond by establishing a third level of anger awareness training.

i. Perceived Strengths of Abby Dads

Fathers made it clear that it is the interpersonal aspects of Abby Dads that are its greatest strength. First and foremost, fathers appreciated the Abby Dads staff, using adjectives such as supportive, caring, knowledgeable, welcoming, and available to describe them. This nicely echoes how the staff themselves view their role at Abby Dads – to model and mentor good fathering practices through a variety of activities, and to do so unfailingly and yet without exerting pressure and expectations on participation and progress. A number of fathers stressed the strength of connection they had developed with a Abby Dads staff member, and how this

motivated them to become better fathers. The downside of such personal connections, of course, is that when there is staff turnover (as was the case in the fall of 2007), those participants strongly attached to the departed staff member often lose their enthusiasm for the program, sometimes permanently.

The second interpersonal strength of Abby Dads is the connections that participants make with other fathers in the program. As noted earlier, reducing social isolation is a goal for some fathers coming in to Abby Dads, while for others it is an unanticipated benefit. Either way, these connections are a key strength. These connections are multidimensional as well. Many fathers appreciate the social opportunities with other fathers, as well as opportunities for their children to have new playmates. It is a relief for some new fathers to realize that they are not the only ones feeling inadequate about their new life role. More experienced participants enjoy taking on mentoring roles with the newly involved, as a way to give back to a program that was and is helpful to them. The sheer diversity of fathers, whether in age, education, life circumstances, or reasons for participation, reinforces the mission of Abby Dads to help men engage in what it means to be a father.

Interviewed fathers did not only focus on the interpersonal strengths of the program. In addition, the following other strengths were mentioned by several participants: a good balance between structured and unstructured activities, the minimal costs of participation, having good facilities and equipment, helping fathers make necessary connections to other community organizations, providing good help for non-custodial fathers, and doing a good job of communicating upcoming activities and events.

j. Suggested Program Improvements

Suggestions for program improvements can be divided into two aspects – how to make current offerings or processes better, and recommendations for new (or renewed) offerings or processes. Interviewed fathers made suggestions on both fronts, with an emphasis on the

latter. Fathers would like an expanded number of Abby Dads activities and events, such as summer sports, outdoor activities and field trips, and more activities during the weekday evenings. This includes the renewal of activities that previously been offered but not currently, such as co-ed softball, a “build-off,” and a summer canoe trip.

Abby Dads staff are aware of fathers’ interest in the expansion of offered activities and events, and indeed have occasionally proposed something new. One example of this was paintball, but this event was eventually cancelled due to lack of committed participants who could afford the costs. Even cost-free activities, such as softball and the canoe trip, have a history of inconsistent attendance, which has led to them being shelved at present. The “build-off,” which last took place in 2007, was a pet project of a staff member who has since departed. All new activities require staff time, and so would either require additional funded staff hours or a concomitant reduction in another activity. And of course, when contemplating any programming decisions, the intended outcomes in the Abby Dads logic model need to be considered.

With regards to making current Abby Dads activities or processes better, a few fathers provided suggestions. The My Daddy and Me breakfast playgroup would be improved by longer hours, allowing fathers with older children to attend, having more open houses, and providing a larger food budget. All group activities would benefit from having both staff attending, to allow for individual help if needed. Several fathers suggested that information about Abby Dads activities should be more widely advertised, whether through local newspapers, referral sources, or other community organizations. There is evidence that a more community-wide approach to advertising Abby Dads activities can be beneficial. One Anger Awareness course offered in the past year was advertised in the local newspaper, and attracted new participants who were otherwise unaware of Abby Dads.

k. Partners' Opinions About Impacts of Abby Dads Participation

One focus group was held with seven partners of fathers currently attending the program. The focus group questions are shown in Appendix B. The main purpose for having this discussion was to gather information about the impacts of Abby Dads on fathers, but from the partners' perspectives. This helps the evaluation, which is largely limited to self-report data, by providing evidence about program impacts that either corroborates or contradicts the fathers' reports. This focus group also provides independent and pertinent information about how the program could be improved. Despite some concerns from Abby Dads staff that gathering partner information might be stressful for the fathers, and perhaps undermine their trust in the program, there was no evidence for this.

It is worth noting that a sample size of seven women in relation to the hundreds of men who have participated to various degrees in the Abby Dads programs does not constitute a statistically significant sample. Furthermore, because participation was voluntary, there is a built in prejudice that those who participated in the focus group had positive outcomes and were more willing to attend a focus group to support a program they believed in. From a research perspective, it must be acknowledged that there may be partners of Abby Dads participants who do not share the same opinions and outcomes of the women who participated in the focus group. What the evaluation is trying to measure in terms of child outcomes and family wellness, are at best nebulous, and must be understood in relation to individual experiences. Although we must recognize that the women who attended the focus group cannot speak on behalf of all partners of Abby Dads fathers, they do provide insight into the effectiveness and strengths of the program. Their astute reflections on the benefits, challenges and potential areas of program expansion, provides another layer of insight into the effectiveness of the Abby Dads program.

The partners were very positive about Abby Dads. They emphasized the same two program strengths most commonly identified by the fathers – the Abby Dads staff and the

opportunity Abby Dads gives fathers to participate in positive group activities with other fathers. As participants in Abby Dads generally, fathers are exposed to staff who are non-judgmental, supportive, and skilled. Paraphrasing one partner's comments, fathers come to see the staff as an "alpha fathers," leading to a sense of trust and commitment to their own father development. As part of Abby Dads group activities, fathers are exposed to a form of peer mentoring, particularly with the veteran participants. In essence, partners appreciate that Abby Dads provides a positive environment for the fathers with opportunities for social activities that let them "blow off steam" in settings free of alcohol and drugs. The women felt that the social activities "bring out the best" in their partners improving the fathers' moods and behaviour leading to a positive feedback loop of happiness and harmony in their families and relationships.

The partners see the results of this positive influence in fathers' increased parenting skills (particularly for those who participated in Nobody's Perfect), a willingness to spend more time with their children, and generally improved spousal behaviour that results in ever-improving relationship harmony. One partner singled out the Family Justice seminars as important vehicles for non-custodial fathers to exert their legal rights. Altogether, the partners felt that Abby Dads makes their lives easier because of the positive effects it has on the fathers.

One theme that came up in several contexts was partners' desire for more couples-oriented activities. This partly stems from a desire to work together with Abby Dads staff, whose relationship and parenting skills they appreciate, and who make a determined effort (particularly for partners based at New Beginnings) to get to know the partners of the Abby Dads fathers. This desire also comes from a belief that couples' issues can best be resolved by working together, rather than separately. While appreciating the strong influence and expertise of the support workers, the focus group mothers did express concern that sometimes the problems encountered by the fathers and subsequently their families, were beyond the current support workers ability to deal with. Building on relationships of trust already established,

many felt having professional counselling services integrated in Abby Dads would be beneficial for tackling some of the deeper issues fathers deal with.

A strong desire was also expressed to facilitate the integration of newly acquired skills such as anger management into the family unit. The mothers found that sometimes after taking courses such as Anger Awareness, fathers will try to impose their learning on them insisting that the mothers are doing things “wrong”. Some of the mothers have themselves taken anger awareness or management courses, and found that the information they received contradicted the skills their partners were trying to impose on them. Mothers in the focus group felt that continuing to offer Anger Awareness separately was needed, but that new programs that spouses could take together to learn relationship, communication and conflict resolution skills would help families grow and learn together.

Some of partners’ suggestions for improving Abby Dads were the same as those of the fathers. They want the program to expand by offering more activities with increased variety. They also suggested that community awareness of the program could be improved, which would attract more sponsorship and allow for this desired expansion. They would like fathers’ parenting training to be enhanced, and so suggested more parenting activities and running a fathers-only Best for Babies.

3.3 South Asian father programming

a. Summary of needs assessment

A needs assessment for developing a South Asian component to Abby Dads was conducted during the first year of the Abby Dads evaluation. A detailed report on the needs assessment, “Discussion Paper – Indo-Canadian Program Component” was written and distributed in the summer of 2008. For the details of the needs assessment and its conclusions,

please refer to the full report, which can be found in Appendix F of this report. The current section provides a summary of the needs assessment.

There are several compelling reasons why it is important for Abbotsford Community Services to address the absence of South Asian fathers in their father involvement program. First, about one in five Abbotsford residents is from this ethnocultural group, with rates of growth much higher than for the non-visible minority population. Second, Abby Dads already includes elements (e.g., anger awareness, parenting skills) that are issues for South Asian fathers. Third, the program would complement programs these fathers are already attending (e.g., Family Outreach, Assaultive Men's group) or are currently attended only by mothers (e.g., Best for Babies). Fourth, health and social service staff who work with South Asian families support a culturally relevant Abby Dads. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it should be beneficial for fathers, mothers, and children in this community.

The main challenges to developing and operating a South Asian component of the program are commitment, time, and money. Key informants emphasized the need to take the time necessary to mobilize and plan, and employ an appropriate South Asian person to act as a community champion (and perhaps program facilitator). Time and effort would also be required of the current program staff - to find and hire a community champion, to make the necessary connections with the South Asian community, and to work collaboratively to plan an inclusive program that honours everyone's needs.

b. Steps towards program development - Introduction

As recommended in the needs assessment report, the first step was to hold a meeting of the Abby Dads staff (and the evaluators) to decide whether to proceed at all with a process to establish a South Asian component to Abby Dads. They agreed that such programming was desirable and necessary, that its development and implementation should be led by someone within the local South Asian community, and that this work needed to be funded sufficiently to allow at least one program for South Asian fathers to reach the point of being developed and

offered on a pilot basis. However, as of September 2008 there was essentially no Abby Dads funding available for this. There was concern about the wisdom of starting such a process without sufficient funds. Using small amounts to hire a temporary, part-time staff person had been tried by the Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee to coordinate their South Asian sub-committee, but the result was continual turnover due to the limited paid hours.

In February 2009, Abby Dads successfully applied for Success by Six funding to be used to support the development of programming for South Asian fathers. Initially, two programming options were considered: establishing a completely separate MDAM program for Punjabi-speaking fathers and their children, or adding a co-facilitated South Asian component to the existing MDAM. The former would be more consistent with the recommendations of the needs assessment, but the latter would be more practical, given the limited funds made available. A third option, refusing the funds out of concern about doing more harm than good (by raising unsustainable expectations), was briefly considered and then rejected.

After advertising in the fall of 2009, two strong candidates emerged, one a relatively new immigrant, and one who is a second-generation Canadian. While this temporary 15 hours per week position was not originally envisioned to be shared between two people, there were some advantages to considering this arrangement. First, the two candidates mirrored two distinct South Asian populations within Abbotsford. As the prior needs assessment established, recent immigrant South Asian fathers and more Westernized fathers would likely have different modes of participation in Abby Dads, and so each candidate could work on attracting South Asian father participation for the population they represented. Second, both candidates had other paid work, and so the minimal hours were not a deterrent to their commitment to their Abby Dads work. Third, one could argue that since both were “starting from scratch” in their respective communities, it would be reasonable to “start slow” and build momentum (and time) as connections and plans were developed. Given these advantages, both candidates were hired in the fall of 2009.

Each then set out to explore the possibilities of adding something uniquely South Asian to what Abby Dads has offered previously. Not surprisingly, both needed time to understand their roles in the program, which by implication involved learning and embodying (to some extent) the Abby Dads perspective on father involvement. One of the new staff members has dedicated his time to assisting the other support workers in two existing programs (My Daddy and Me, and Dads and Kids at Play), with the hope of increasing the participation of South Asian fathers. The other resource worker has been actively engaged in the South Asian community promoting the importance of the role of fathers in their children's lives, and developing and sometimes implementing new programs geared specifically towards South Asian participation. After getting off to a slow start (due to the challenges of starting their work just before the holiday season), these support workers have been actively engaged in promoting Abby Dads. Although there has not been enough time and work accumulated to conduct a summative assessment of their endeavours thus far, the work that has been accomplished is worthy of review.

c. Activities

Attempts have been made to introduce three new program initiatives specifically serving the South Asian population. From these early starts, only one program has been successful, the other two have yet to come to fruition.

The first new program initiative offered a swimming class (at Matsqui Recreation Centre) designed for fathers and their children. This program was considered a success with participation from five South Asian fathers and their children. The resource worker who organized this program credited its success to three factors. First, swimming in public pools is typically restricted to men and children within the South Asian community. By contacting the mothers he knew in the community (through a long-established South Asian Best for Babies program), he was able to convince them to encourage their husbands to participate in the swimming lessons with their children. In other words, the women, who traditionally are the

primary caretakers of children in the Indo-Canadian culture, were given a socially acceptable opportunity to invite fathers to play an active role in teaching their children. The second reason the program was successful was a small subsidy paid by the father involvement program for the swimming lessons.

Normally the cost of a series of six lessons is \$32. Abby Dads paid a subsidy of \$12, so participants were able to get a 'deal' on the lessons for \$20. As the resource worker explained, "South Asian households are run like businesses. They have to understand how the programs are going to benefit their families. If they don't perceive a benefit, then they will not participate." In this case there was a perceived benefit since there was a savings on the price it would normally cost to participate in swimming lessons. The third reason the program was a success was that fathers who were new immigrants were able to participate because they had the role model of the resource worker to follow. This is a reminder that a simple visit to a local pool can be fraught with ambiguity, shyness and discomfort to those who are new to Canada. Having a role model who can help navigate them through their first experiences at a public pool in Canada is a valuable tool for ensuring future use of the facilities for fathers and their children.

There appeared to be strong interest amongst those who participated in the first series of swimming lessons to continue with a second series of lessons, even with the understanding that these new lessons would not be subsidized. In addition, other South Asian fathers expressed interest in participating in the subsidized first set of swimming lessons. In the end, however, when the two next sets of lessons began (on relatively short notice), the new group had good attendance while the repeat group failed to show. As a result, these lessons were cancelled.

Initially, one of the greatest obstacles to the success of the swimming program was the rather tepid support given by the Recreation Centre managers, who seemed to treat this innovative program as just another community group wanting to access their facilities. It

required a persistent effort on the part of the Abby Dads Supervisor just to confirm the details of the lessons, and make sure that the arrangements were set. This perceived lack of support was resolved by the end of the first set of lessons, with the Recreation Centre showing more support and enthusiasm for this South Asian-specific programming by making more times available to Abby Dads for future rounds of swimming lessons. More recently, this support and enthusiasm has been bolstered considerably by a phenomenon that was not anticipated by anyone. All of a sudden, a number of South Asian families have begun making use of the pool, a rare event in the past for cultural reasons relating to things like female modesty and traditional father roles.

Another program that was initiated, but was unsuccessful was a family movie night. Family movie night was scheduled to follow the South Asian Best for Babies program. Unfortunately, there was little interest in this program, and it failed.

The third program initiative was a joint venture between the Abby Dads and a local elementary school with a large South Asian student base. Coordinating with the principal of the elementary school, the resource workers hoped to start a floor hockey program for dads and their children. The program was not advertised very well and consequently nothing came from it. The resource workers hope that in the future the program can be revived with renewed interest and advertising.

d. Use of Remaining Funds

As of May 1st, there were enough remaining funds for each South Asian support worker to work for a total of about 75 additional hours. The more westernized resource worker is carrying on at the Saturday breakfast playgroup program, and devoted time to planning the annual Fathers' Day Celebrating Dads event as well as Family Sports Day. The new immigrant resource worker's primary involvement for his remaining hours will be facilitating swimming lessons. However, there may be some challenges in fulfilling this role consistently as he has

moved to Surrey to be nearer to work opportunities. Conflicts between his main employment (which is casual on-call) and the swimming lesson schedule have already arisen, but the other South Asian support worker has been able to fill in.

e. Has it Been Worth the Effort?

It has only been about a half-year since these two South Asian support workers began their work at Abby Dads. On the positive side, the more westernized worker is now well-trained in the implementation of some Abby Dads programs, and has been a good help to these programs as an additional staff person. However, so far his participation in these programs has not resulted in the primary intended benefit, which was to enable South Asian father participation in these programs. The plan for reaching these fathers and children has not yet been specified. The new immigrant resource worker was successful in facilitating a new swimming program for South Asian fathers and their children, which has seemingly acted as a catalyst for change in South Asian families' use of the pool. However, this required a lot of support from the Abby Dads Supervisor to make the necessary arrangements with the Recreation Centre, and was not successful in attempts to establish a family movie night and floor hockey for fathers and children.

In the needs assessment report, the recommendations emphasized the importance of building South Asian father involvement in a careful and sustainable way. Unsatisfying past experience with projects relying on short-term funding has been instructive, but sometimes the only opportunities that present themselves are short-term, at least in the beginning. The Abby Dads program as a whole, it should be remembered, started off as a short-term, limited program, and yet it has continued to thrive for more than a decade. It has even taken on a life of its own (i.e., not just as part of New Beginnings) with sustained core funding from the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD). And so, how should we assess this attempt at meeting an unmet program priority?

It is clear that the experience has been beneficial to the two resource workers. Each has learned how to facilitate father involvement, though not necessarily with South Asian fathers and children. The downside of this benefit, of course, is that this training is unlikely to help Abby Dads once the two resource workers have ended their employment. Taking advantage of short-term Success by Six funding has also been helpful to Abby Dads, as it now has some experiences and successes that can be used when applying for funding in the future. Although the larger partnership connection has not yet been made obvious, Parks & Recreation and Abby Dads now offer two father/child-specific programs together – South Asian swimming lessons, and Dads and Kids at Play. This presents an opportunity for future discussions with Parks & Recreation at the city-wide level about how to partner more generally.

The hoped-for benefits of having established some level of ongoing South Asian father involvement in Abby Dads will not have been achieved by the time funding runs out. There were attempts to parlay the success of swimming lessons into interest in attending My Daddy and Me, but without success. Other proposed activities for South Asian fathers and their children did not come to fruition. One lesson seems to be that activities with a tangible (particularly financial) benefit have the most chance of initial success, with later success riding on establishing other tangible, but not necessarily financial, benefits of continued participation. It would be greatly helpful, for the sake of future funded opportunities, to have the current South Asian support workers explore and list the specific activities in which South Asian fathers would be interested. It would also be helpful to evaluate the viability of greater South Asian participation in My Daddy and Me – the necessary conditions for success, assuming that this is viable in any form.

3.4 New programming since 2007

a. Family justice seminars

Providing information to fathers (and to mothers as well) to help them with their family justice-related issues was identified as one of the top priority areas for new Abby Dads programming. The first Family Justice seminar was held in November, 2007. Twenty-five attendees rotated through tables headed by five family justice system professionals (e.g., judge, lawyer, counsellor, Family Maintenance Enforcement Program, and Family Justice mediator) to ask questions and get advice. Feedback from the participants and professionals confirmed the helpfulness of this opportunity to learn about the system.

As a result of this initial success, the Law Foundation of BC was approached and provided a two-year grant to fund Family Justice seminars. Starting in June 2008, and continuing until the present, four sessions per year have taken place, with the exception of June 2009, when the number of people signing up was smaller than usual. In the six Family Justice seminars held from June 2008 until February 2010, 175 people participated in one or more sessions. Unlike the first pre-Law Foundation session, most of these participants came from the larger community and were not currently involved in Abby Dads. Attendees were primarily fathers (about 60% of participants), mothers (about 32% of participants) and grandparents.

All participants were asked to complete a one-page evaluation form (see Appendix C) at the end of the session; almost two-thirds took the time to provide feedback. Not surprisingly, participants were seeking information on a variety of justice-related issues. The most common sought-after information was legal advice, whether about custody, legal rights of different family members, or court orders. Information about maintenance payments was also a common reason for attending the sessions. Specific questions relating to visitation and access were the next most common. There were two relatively uncommon areas of information that participants were seeking at the outset of the sessions – alternatives to court, and family justice

counselling. For most attendees, learning about these two areas was a side benefit of participation.

Almost all of the participants (94 percent) reported that they came away from the session with at least some of the answers they were seeking. About one-third got all of their questions answered to their satisfaction. This proportion would have been higher but for the limited time available with each professional. Participants were complimentary about the professionals' skills and knowledge; getting the appropriate advice was mostly a function of how clearly the questions were phrased.

The participants were quite satisfied with the small group rotation format, which compelled them to visit with each of the professionals. This rotation helped participants learn about aspects of the justice system and associated support systems that were sometimes relevant to their situations. They also gained perspective that there are others in the community facing very similar challenges to their own.

There has been relatively little turnover in the professionals leading the Family Justice sessions; in fact, the same person has occupied the important "judge" chair from the beginning. Not surprisingly given the seminars' focus on justice, many participants look forward most to being able to ask questions of the judge, and find her information to be the most helpful. As for the professionals, they relish the opportunity to help parents understand the system better, including the range of services and resources available to families. The value of their participation in these seminars is made evident to them whenever they "see a participant's light bulb turn on," and certainly when they see the participants at their offices or in the courts, taking advantage of the knowledge they gained .

In the original workplan, two evaluation questions were included to assess the impact of attending a Family Justice seminar: the number of fathers who go on to make new connections with helping services (including Abby Dads) based on the information they learned at the

seminar, and the impact of these new connections on their family justice issues. These questions turned out to be essentially impossible to answer, as the feedback forms do not ask for the name or contact information of attendees. Also, family justice issues are rarely resolved quickly, making it difficult to assess the ultimate impact of attending a Family Justice seminar within the time frame of the evaluation. However, some limited information could be gleaned from the father interviews. Seven of the fathers had attended a Family Justice session; all had been involved with Abby Dads already. Therefore, none of those interviewed had joined Abby Dads as a result of first attending a Family Justice session. Of the fathers who did attend, some were already custodial parents, and attended out of general interest rather than to help with a personal need. For the non-custodial parents who attended, their interviews took place too soon after attendance to expect any impact. These parents did find the information from the seminars useful, and were proceeding with their family justice-related quests with the support of the Abby Dads workers.

b. Activities for fathers and their school-aged children (Dads and Kids at Play)

Dads and Kids at Play (DKAP) is one of the newer activities offered at Abby Dads, specifically designed for fathers with children aged 5 to 12. Fathers with elementary school-age children were identified as a priority target for new programming, as outlined in the proposal to the Vancouver Foundation in 2007. From the start, DKAP was designed as a joint venture with Abbotsford Parks & Recreation, with supervision shared between staff from both Abby Dads and Parks & Recreation. It was initially offered as a once-weekly, 17 week program during the 2008/09 fiscal year, located in the Agri-Rec Centre. Starting in the fall of 2009, the program moved to Abbotsford Recreation Centre, still once-weekly, but shifting from Tuesdays to Mondays. There will be a summer 2010 hiatus, as there was in 2009, and both Abby Dads and Parks & Recreation are interested in continuing this program in the fall of 2010.

Central Abbotsford Community School, which has been involved with Abby Dads as part of the planning committee for the Celebrating Dads (Fathers' Day) celebration, has always been

interested in hosting a second DKAP program. These good intentions have yet to be acted upon, mostly due to lack of Abby Dads staff time for this additional weekly activity. Further staff time restrictions as a result of budget reductions have initiated internal discussions about the best program delivery model going forward for DKAP. The end result of these discussions may be either the elimination of this activity or its expansion to the community school (and potentially elsewhere).

The fate of DKAP (so far undetermined) helps to illustrate what makes Abby Dads unique among father involvement programs in B.C. As detailed in the Sustainability section of this report, many father-specific programs in the province have simply disappeared as a response to the current funding shortfalls for social service programs. DKAP has characteristics that make it a good candidate for (at least temporary) elimination from the roster of current Abby Dads activities. It is relatively new, it has not yet reached the stability of attendance of more established Abby Dads activities, and it is not very well connected with other Abby Dads activities. Many participating fathers are not even aware that this is an activity within a father involvement program. On the other hand, DKAP has grown steadily, with 20 to 28 dads and their kids taking part at least occasionally, even if only three or four dads are “regulars.” There is interest in new DKAP groups, such as a Central Abbotsford Community School.

These positives have led Abby Dads staff to consider ways to support a partnered program like DKAP within its own fiscal limitations. One idea being considered for DKAP (and more generally as an Abby Dads model) is for the Father Support Staff to act primarily as trainers rather than as those staffing the activity. For DKAP, this would involve coming to the first few sessions in the fall with the focus on training their Parks & Recreation staff counterparts to provide a father-centred experience, rather than the more typical child-centred supervision. This training model would likely work best if Parks & Recreation assigned staff to DKAP who are open and enthusiastic about providing a father-centred orientation.

c. Involvement of single and part-time fathers

Rather than designing more programming to meet this goal, it was decided that a better approach would be one of improving outreach to this group through promotional activities. A new brochure was developed in 2008; copies are distributed to agencies and displayed on community bulletin boards. These brochures bring important community-wide visibility to Abby Dads, but are somewhat limited because they cannot be easily updated to reflect new programming or upcoming special events. The brochures do prominently feature the Abby Dads web address, however, to provide a means for potential participants to get complete and up-to-date information about Abby Dads. This assumes that computer access is not an issue, which may be questionable for some of these vulnerable single and part-time fathers.

Some of these fathers have a connection to MCFD, and so promotional or informational activities targeted there would take advantage of this connection. One of the Abby Dads support workers has already taken the step of attending one or more MCFD meetings for the purposes of providing information about Abby Dads, emphasizing the connection, and encouraging MCFD to refer their father clients to Abby Dads as appropriate. Taking the initiative of talking to MCFD staff was important, as some staff members were unaware of Abby Dads and what it has to offer. Formal dialogue between Abby Dads and MCFD should continue on an occasional basis through activities such as workshops, conferences, and individual meetings, with the goal of attracting more MCFD of these vulnerable father clients to participate in Abby Dads activities. There is already evidence of increased involvement of fathers with MCFD connections. In the 2008/2009 Annual Report, it was estimated that about 25% of Abby Dads participants came from referrals from Best for Babies, MCFD, Xylohemeylh Family Services and Family Education.

d. Fathers' drop-in/support group (Dads Unlimited)

After being at Abby Dads for about a year, and getting to know the fathers and the range of available activities for them, the part-time Support Worker identified a gap in services that should be filled - a regular opportunity for Abby Dads fathers to get together to support one another. Essentially, this group would function as a peer group version of the individual support component of Abby Dads. From the Support Worker's perspective, such a group would provide support that was real and ongoing. Drawn largely from participants in Anger Awareness, a support group called *Dads Unlimited* was established in March 2009, meeting each week.

In its first three months of existence, a total of 10 fathers participated in the support group. A similar number of father participated in the 2009/10 fiscal year. Attendance at any one session was smaller, and did not seem to be growing over time, unlike other Abby Dads activities such as Dads and Kids at Play. One of the fathers compiled a list of father-friendly local community activities called Trevor's List, which the group distributed to everyone within Abby Dads. Occasionally, members of the support group would socialize at these community activities. Recently, after some discussion about providing a sharper focus and more energy for this support group, the model was changed to become a third level of Anger Awareness, offered as a four-session series. In this third level, participants explore collective ways that fathers can deal with their anger issues. This workshop was offered for the first time in the spring of 2010.

e. Abby Dads website (Abbydads.ca) and Facebook pages

Launching in March 2007, the Abbydads.ca website was initially designed for the purpose of providing information about Abby Dads to clients, potential clients, other service providers and funders. The website was designed with input from program staff and constructed by an employee of Abbotsford Community Services with a background in website design and technology. Since the initial construction of the website, there have been no major

changes to its design, function or graphics. Informational changes are updated on a regular basis including program information, staff changes, activities, and resources.

Website statistics are tracked and available for a twelve-month period of time. Although the website has been operational for three years, statistics are only available for the last twelve months. Since no reports are available from March 2007 to May 2009 we are unable to analyze how website use and traffic patterns have changed over the past three years. We are only able to give an analysis and picture of recent website use.

Over the last twelve months, the Abbydads.ca website has seen an average of 18 unique visitors per day and 560 unique visitors per month. Over the last twelve months there have been no significant increases or decreases in daily traffic patterns. The number of 'hits' peak on the website between 3 p.m. and 11 p.m. and are at their lowest between from the hours of 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The primary point of entry into the website is the 'index page' that is reached when the web address (abbydads.ca) is entered. This page prominently features program sponsor's logos with links to their respective organizations. No information about the Abby Dads program is provided on this page. A link to "Enter Site" that blends into a header that runs across the top of the page directs people to the actual home page and information for Abby Dads. It is interesting to note that this 'index page' is ranked as the primary page for exiting the site, which means a significant number of people accessing abbydads.ca for information never get beyond the opening page that lists program sponsors. It might be worth reconsidering the placement of program sponsors in relation to the overall website design to include information about Abby Dads on its opening page.

Information in the website is currently maintained by one of the father support workers. This staff member is able to directly access the web pages to make changes to text. Changes to graphics, design layout, index and tabs must be made through the technical staff at Abbotsford

Community Services. To date, there have been no changes to these areas, but several of the pictures on the website are outdated, and as mentioned earlier, statistics would indicate a problem with the overall layout of the design that features sponsor information to the exclusion of program information at the point of entry.

In addition to the website, Abby Dads also has three distinct Facebook presences under the names *Jeff Abbydads*, *Ed Dads*, and *Abbotsford Father Involvement Program*. The first two are set up as personal accounts. Neither contains any Abby Dads program information, as these sites are not intended for recruiting new Abby Dads participants. The wall for *Jeff Abbydads* is updated frequently with information/reminders about upcoming programs or special events such as floor hockey, Nobody's Perfect, or Olympic hockey tickets. It was even used to recruit female partners of the Abby Dads fathers for a focus group in February 2010 as part of this Abby Dads evaluation. While it may seem unusual to recruit females using a Facebook site dedicated to a father involvement program, it turns out that of the 200 or so friends of *Jeff Abbydads*, about 70% are female. Most of these women have a connection to Abby Dads, either through a relationship with a participating father and/or through a past or present membership in New Beginnings or Best for Babies. Thus, *Jeff Abbydads* functions as a place for that particular Abby Dads support worker to communicate about Abby Dads-related things with people he already knows through a work-related connection. The other Abby Dads site, *Ed Dads*, currently has 28 friends (about 40% women) and has been much less active. Fathers who are involved in activities led by this support worker (e.g., Anger Awareness) must use a different means to exchange Abby Dads-related information.

Abby Dads use of electronic media can be summarized as somewhat haphazard, and not taking full advantage of the opportunities that such media provide. Given that most Abby Dads participants and potential participants are under the age of 30, electronic media should be used more purposefully and extensively. Currently, the website is only used to provide information, whether to existing participants, prospective participants, community organizations that refer clients to such programs, or curious members of the public. As previously mentioned, for the sake of those who access the site unaware of any program details, it would be useful to include

some general information on the index page. This will certainly increase the proportion of people accessing more website pages. Also, website statistics should be downloaded monthly, so that this longitudinal information is retained. Web usage information can be particularly useful for tracking the effects of marketing and publicity. For example, when newspaper advertisements (e.g., for Anger Awareness) or articles about the program mention the website address, a “bump” in traffic would be expected, which could be observed in the monthly statistics. The effectiveness of marketing and publicity generally could be roughly gauged using the website.

Similarly, Facebook is not being used to its full potential at present. The *Jeff Abbydads* page seems to provide an effective communication link between that Abby Dads staff member and a wide variety of people who are already connected to Abby Dads. It seems likely that reinvigorating the *Ed Dads* page would be helpful for the other Abby Dads staff member and his particular Abby Dads connections to communicate with each other. The name of this page should also be changed to *Ed Abbydads* for consistency. The third Facebook page (*Abbotsford Father Involvement Program*) completes the circle of giving access to the program to those who are unaware of its existence. It is well-named, as it uses the key words that someone would use on Facebook to search for a program specifically for fathers in Abbotsford. The information page would be improved by providing additional information about the program, rather than just the physical address (out of date as of July 1, 2010) and a link to the abbydads.ca website.

3.5 Program sustainability

a. Introduction

Since the Father Involvement Program’s simple beginnings in 1995 as a support service to fathers of pregnant or parenting female adolescents, the program has evolved into a more autonomous organization trying to address the diverse needs of an increasingly large number

of fathers. As the program has grown in size and community importance, it becomes increasingly important to carefully think through and plan for sustainability. This entails consideration of a variety of issues, from an analysis of what are the essential elements of Abby Dads, to current and potential funding sources, and administrative practices, and finally strategies for sustainability.

b. Sustainability in other BC fathering programs

To gain a clearer understanding of these issues and how the current practices of Abby Dads relate to other initiatives in the province, interviews were conducted with other program operators in British Columbia currently offering father focused services. These program providers were identified using a data base provided by the Father Involvement Network of BC. Appendix D shows the questions used for the interviews.

Contact with thirteen community organizations from all over the province was initiated. Of the thirteen contacts, representatives from five organizations were interviewed by telephone, two organizations responded to a list of questions by email (one of which is currently unable to offer programming because they lost their office space and operating facilities when the organization they were sharing with asked them to vacate.) Three other organizations no longer offered father-focused programming and therefore did not participate in our study. Finally, three of the thirteen organizations did not respond to contact by email or telephone. The seven organizations that participated in our research by telephone or email were asked a series of questions in regards to their program's goals, funding, management and general sense of father-focused programming in BC.

Of the organizations interviewed, father focused programs have been operating between two to eight years within their respective communities. The programs most frequently offered include weekly father-child drop-ins (some provide meals such as breakfast or dinner),

parenting support programs (formal and drop-in), referral services, Nobody's Perfect, and anger awareness/management programs. Other services include:

- Separation & Divorce drop-in
- Parental Alienation Awareness Program
- Family Justice System Seminars & Counselling
- Family Crisis Support Services
- Research Initiatives
- Counselling Services.

From a philosophical standpoint, all the programs interviewed expressed program goals to include: helping fathers learn the necessary skills to be effective parents, helping fathers learn to identify with their role of 'father', helping fathers connect with other fathers, and helping fathers overcome obstacles in their lives. What differentiates these programs however, is a philosophical dichotomy as to whether the overall program goals are there to assist 'families' or 'men.' Three of the seven interviewed programs have the needs of men at the centre of their philosophy, wherein, the role of 'father' is an off-shoot of the primary role of being a man. As one respondent stated, "father Involvement is not about developing programs for fathers, but should be about developing programs for men who happen to be fathers. Fathers need to be treated holistically as men first." Conversely, the other four programs primarily serviced the family, to which 'fathers' were an off-shoot. These programs focused on men strictly as they relate to their children, with the overall health of the family being the primary goal of the organization.

Four of the seven interviewed organizations operated their father-focused programs under the umbrella of a larger family services / community services provider. One organization operated under the umbrella of a larger agency providing services to new immigrants. Two organizations were independent men's resource centres that focused primarily on the needs of men but included services and support for families.

Five of the seven interviewed programs share facilities, office space, computers and resources with other programs. Of the two independent men's resource centres, one had its

own independent facility, space and computers to operate its programs. The other had recently lost its office space and operating facilities when the organization they were sharing with asked them to vacate. They are currently unable to provide services to fathers, but are hoping that funding and operating space will be re-established.

Primary sources of funding for the father focused programming offered by the agencies that data was collected from include the Ministry for Children and Family Development, the Public Health Agency of Canada and the United Way. Other sources of funding include:

- Northern Health Authority
- BC Gaming
- Local Credit Union
- Private Donations
- Membership Fees

The effects of the economic downturn and the corresponding cutbacks to government funding of programs and services offered to families, children and fathers in particular was evident in the research. Six of the seven interviewed organizations studied considered their funding unstable. As one respondent stated, “the only thing stable about funding is its instability.” One of these organizations relies on its coordinator to volunteer his time in between funding cycles to maintain their program. By and large, the program funding that exists is piecemeal wherein programs are tailored to fit the criteria of the funding options available. It can be assumed that the three organizations contacted by the researchers that no longer offered father focused programming have been unable to obtain funds to continue their programs.

Only one agency reported feeling secure with its funding. Since this agency began operating seven years ago, it has been funded solely by its local United Way. This agency has maintained strong ties with the United Way and participates in the United Way’s campaign by doing presentations to local businesses about the services and programming it provides to local fathers.

It is ironic that as the programs offered by Abby Dads have evolved and become more sophisticated over the last three years, creating a climate wherein serious planning and action for long term sustainability can and must take place, the current economic climate poses a serious challenge to funding initiatives. Current cutbacks in government funding have made all the organizations worried about the financial viability of their programs. Even in cases where there has been no direct impact to government funding, there is worry that those experiencing government cutbacks are putting pressure on private fundraising efforts resulting in community philanthropy being stretched to capacity.

c. The essential elements of Abby Dads

Over its 15 year history, father involvement programming in Abbotsford has continually expanded from its original core mandate of helping the young fathers whose partners or ex-partners attend the New Beginnings young parent program. One of the earliest expansions was the inclusion of other fathers with child custody or access issues, as well as fathers with high risk profiles. Serving this particular group of fathers continues to be an essential element of Abby Dads, not only because of their historical importance, but also because these are the fathers that MCFD has most in mind in providing financially for the program from year to year. Besides the practical importance of serving clients most connected with the primary program funder, it is also true that these same fathers tend to be the ones with the weakest father identity formation. Thus, they would derive the most benefit from the program's philosophical mandate of mentoring men to become fathers.

The high priority that has traditionally been assigned to young fathers with child custody/access problems, as well as the inherent challenges of Abby Dads staff to support these fathers, led slowly and perhaps inexorably to the development of a new approach - Family Justice seminars. These seminars have been an unqualified success in terms of ongoing participation and satisfaction, for both the participants and the professionals. (The impact of these seminars has been harder to measure, and will likely require more time, and an

opportunity to do an in-depth evaluation specifically for this program.) Setting this programming component apart from other Abby Dads programming is the inclusion of anyone who would like to participate including mothers, grandparents and step-parents. Although the primary goal of the seminars was to provide information to family justice information to fathers, the programs inclusion of all members of the public has positioned it to not only serve the interests of fathers, but to serve the larger community.

Another essential element for sustainability is community visibility and connections. The success of the Family Justice seminars is one example where offering the community an innovative and needed service (one that also happens to support fathers) created a higher profile for Abby Dads. In the few years, the number of brief contacts has mushroomed, fuelled largely by community questions about the Family Justice sessions. Another example of community visibility is the recent swimming lessons for South Asian fathers and their children. Although this program is very new, there are anecdotal reports from the recreation centre managers that the program seems to have encouraged more South Asian families to use the pool. This could provide an opportunity for Abby Dads to expand these lessons (since there is more community interest), and open the door to sustaining the participation of South Asian fathers more generally.

The example of the swimming lessons also illustrates the potential for improving sustainability through activities delivered jointly with community partners such as Abbotsford Parks & Recreation, which is also the partner for Dads and Kids at Play. In this case, the sustainability may be primarily financial, where the community partner provides some funding in exchange for the expertise of the father support worker attached to the activity. This funding may be used to fund the support worker's direct time in the activity, or it could be used for training Parks & Recreation staff on how to structure the activity to further father involvement, rather than for enjoyment alone. The sustainability benefit may be primarily financial because it is less obvious to the fathers using these services that they are participating in a father involvement program, and so community visibility for Abby Dads is not improved.

Last but not least, the essence of Abby Dads (and its success) rests on its steadfast reliance on its well-developed logic model and associated program philosophy of mentoring men to identify with the role of father. The support staff workers embody this philosophy, whether providing individual support, curriculum-based programs, or even recreational and social programs (whether for fathers only or with their children). As noted in the earlier section on impacts, this is having the intended effects on participating fathers. They consistently and strongly report that Abby Dads participation has made them better parents, through learning the role of “father” from the support workers and the other participating dads. To a large extent, the future success of Abby Dads will be a function of how well it remains true to its essence - the logic model and program philosophy.

d. Funding

Over its history, Abby Dads has been primarily funded by a combination of direct provincial government funding from MCFD (or corresponding provincial ministry in earlier years) and a share of the Abbotsford Community Services discretionary fundraised dollars. Occasionally, the budget is supplemented as a consequence of successful proposals to other funding sources for time-limited grant funding. In the past three years, there have been three organizations that have funded specific program enhancements – the Vancouver Foundation, the Law Foundation, and Success by Six. The Vancouver Foundation funds were used to explore options for increasing South Asian father involvement in Abbotsford, to expand services to fathers with school-age children, and to conduct an evaluation of the program. The Law Foundation of BC funding was used to offer quarterly Family Justice sessions, where community members interact in small groups with professionals within the local family justice system. The Success by Six funding was used to run the My Daddy and Me program and to hire two part-time South Asian father support workers to help develop and test program options for South Asian fathers in the community.

The Abby Dads program is currently operating on a reduced budget compared to the three previous years, mostly because funding from these three sources has ended. There is still a small amount of Success by Six money, which is being used to retain the two South Asian support workers during the current fiscal year. Through the efforts of the Manager of Early Development and Family Resource Programs at ACS, Abby Dads program core funding has been preserved this year despite MCFD budget reductions to all funded programs, including ones at ACS. Had Abby Dads been asked to bear a proportionate share of this year's shortfall, it would almost certainly have forced a retrenchment to one support worker and the attendant loss of some of the existing programming.

e. Shortage of administrative time

One recent challenge for the financial sustainability of the Abby Dads program has been difficulty finding sufficient administrative time for seeking out and applying for new funding opportunities as they arise. At one time, these applications were the responsibility of one person at ACS on behalf of all of their programs, but this position has not existed for some time. Currently, one role of the Manager of Early Development and Resource Programs is to monitor new Abby Dads funding opportunities and to support proposal-writing efforts, and the Abby Dads Supervisor's role is to write proposals for these fund opportunities that seem promising. In the past year or two, as a result of the economic recession, these opportunities have been scarce. The closing of some of the father involvement programs around BC is a testament to this scarcity. However, at Abby Dads, the administrative staff have felt that one or two promising grants might have been missed in the past year because they were very busy keeping up with their other job responsibilities. Thus, the current budgetary woes, while inevitable to a large extent, may have been ameliorated somewhat had there been sufficient administrative time to give proper attention to sustaining the current level of Abby Dads programming.

f. Strategies for sustainability

Budget shortfalls have resulted in reduced hours in 2010/2011 for both of the permanent Abby Dads Father Support Workers. Starting in July 2010, the total number of hours available per week will be reduced by 14 hours (a drop of 24% from the previous year). Staff, in consultation with Abby Dads funders, have been examining different strategies to revamp Abby Dads to deal with this current reality; these include eliminating lower-priority activities, reducing activity hours, and for activities like Dads and Kids at Play that are offered jointly with community partners, rethinking the role of Abby Dads staff in program delivery. These are all tried-and-true strategies for program survival when there are system-wide funding cuts. There also has been an increased vigilance around funding opportunities as they arise, including looking carefully through online directories of funding bodies and their grants. This evaluation will also play an important role in sustainability, by providing independent documentation about the many positive and unique attributes of the Abbotsford program to prospective funders.

4. Recommendations

1. *In economically difficult times, prioritize administrative attention for seeking and responding to available funding opportunities.*

Stable funding is a prerequisite for Abby Dads to continue to build on its long history of successes. As the programming has expanded over the years, there has been an increasing reliance on a mixture of funding sources, particularly one-time grants. To maintain newer programming and expand even further, regular doses of new funding are necessary.

The Abby Dads Supervisor and the Manager of Early Development and Resource Programs each have defined responsibilities around seeking and responding to requests for proposals. The administrative system has worked relatively well in the past, but as each has taken on an increasing burden of responsibilities, the system has begun to break down, resulting recently in some lost opportunities for new or renewed funding.

The Supervisor and/or Manager require more time dedicated to the important task of Abby Dads fundraising. It seems this would only be possible if either could off-load some of her other responsibilities, or someone else took on the fundraising role. The option of reallocating some of the Supervisor's responsibilities is discussed in the next recommendation.

2. *Increase the proportion of Abby Dads staff hours dedicated to supervisory responsibilities, and work on a new supervisory model that emphasizes Abby Dads' autonomy from New Beginnings.*

The Abby Dads Supervisor is also the Supervisor for New Beginnings, with three hours per week currently assigned to Abby Dads duties. This lean allotment to supervision was consciously chosen to concentrate as much core funding as possible on program delivery.

However, these three hours are now recognized as inadequate to address her regular weekly (and quarterly/annual reporting) responsibilities, especially considering how the program has expanded over the past few years. When new staff are hired to add qualitatively new program components, as was the case for the two South Asian father support workers, the burden of additional supervisory time is significant, both in the short- and medium-term. Grant proposal-writing responsibilities add to this burden, especially when the funding climate is difficult, but time for this role is important for program sustainability.

Increasing the hours of the Abby Dads Supervisor is not feasible, given her almost-full-time workload. Thus, it would be ideal for someone else to take on some (or all) of her Abby Dads responsibilities, expanding the number of designated Abby Dads supervisory hours in the process. Having someone with Abby Dads-only supervisory responsibilities would help establish Abby Dads's autonomy from New Beginnings, which could be advantageous when applying for various sources of funding.

Of course, finding someone else to take on Abby Dads supervisory responsibilities may be challenging. There is limited interest among the two current Father Support workers to add supervision duties to their jobs, particularly at the expense of any of their front-line responsibilities. In any case, with the current financial woes that have affected not only Abby Dads but all ACS programs, funding any additional supervisory work at all may seem impossible. Perhaps there may be some capacity within ACS to coordinate grant proposal writing across programs (as was done in the past), which would help with that aspect of the Abby Dads Supervisor's work. The fact remains that the Abby Dads supervision model, in its current form and with its current resourcing, will become less and less sustainable. The alternatives to the current model are unclear, but it is important to devise and debate some alternatives, sooner rather than later.

3. *Assign a high priority to fundraising efforts specifically to retain one or both South Asian Resource Workers*

A high priority for Abby Dads, to be addressed in this evaluation, was to investigate ways to address the under-representation of South Asian fathers in the program. A needs assessment conducted in the first year of the evaluation established the need, and laid out the recommended steps to move forward to fill this gap. Unfortunately, funding was unavailable to follow the recommended steps, but with a small amount of Success by Six funding, two very part-time Resource Workers were hired in 2009 for a few months of work.

Despite somewhat low expectations of success given the circumstances, there was one program that bore some fruit – swimming lessons for South Asian children, with involvement of their fathers. While the jury is out as to the sustainability of the initial success, the mere presence of fathers and children together at the pool (with perhaps some word of mouth) has had the unintended consequence of greater South Asian family participation in pool activities generally. This bodes well for the potential for future South Asian Abby Dads activities, as it is easier to harness existing father/child recreation activities for father involvement purposes than it would be to start from scratch.

Whatever potential that has been created can only be harnessed, in a Abby Dads-appropriate way, by one of the South Asian resource workers. As the needs assessment firmly established, father involvement must be built within the South Asian community. Therefore, it is necessary to find ways to maintain at least one of these resource positions. Otherwise, the risk of creating and then dashing community expectations, foreseen in the needs assessment, will have come true.

4. *Consider nominal fees for some activities and/or fathers.*

Charging fees for some activities and/or fathers is one way to compensate for funding shortfalls, particularly when shortfalls have resulted in reduced staff hours, as they have in the current fiscal year. Since reduced staff hours imply reductions in activities offered, fee-for-service is a vehicle for restoring activities that fathers have come to expect. However, instituting fees has a lot of potential for undesired consequences, and so careful planning and consideration are needed. For example, if a fee was charged for all participants of the Anger Awareness Workshops, it would probably violate the terms (implied or explicit) of the Abby Dads funding provided by the Ministry for Children and Family Development. Fathers referred to Abby Dads by MCFD would have to be exempt from fees for programs to help with anger issues, as these issues are very often contributing factors in their referrals. On the other hand, charging fees only to non-referred fathers seems to violate the philosophy of Abby Dads of universal availability to all dads.

The best candidates for fee-for-service are the activities offered in conjunction with community partners, such as Parks & Recreation. Users of recreation facilities are accustomed to paying nominal fees, and the facility operators already have structures in place for collecting fees and doing the associated bookkeeping. The fees would be used to pay both the Abby Dads and Parks & Recreation staff members involved in the activities, since both are contributing to the success of the program. Ideally, all of the fees would go to Abby Dads, in compensation for the mentoring that Abby Dads staff are providing to their counterparts about how to build father involvement into the activities. There would be no issues around charging MCFD-referred fathers, since the activities are primarily recreational.

5. *Reinforce and build on successful community partnerships in the past three years, starting with Abbotsford Parks & Recreation.*

A partnership between Abby Dads and Abbotsford Parks & Recreation has been established in the past three years, starting in 2008 with the delivery of a recreation program for fathers and their children aged 6 to 10 (Dads and Kids at Play), and more recently in 2010 with swimming lessons for South Asian fathers and their children. In both programs, which are offered at two different recreation centres, a Abby Dads staff member teams with a Parks & Recreation staff member. This ensures a “father involvement” focus, rather than the more typical focus on the children in such situations.

Up until now, this partnership has been specific to managing and delivering the two activities. It is really more like two separate activity-specific partnerships where both partners just happen to be Abby Dads and Parks & Recreation. It makes sense for Abby Dads to pursue a more general partnership, engaging Parks & and Recreation managers at a higher organizational level to explore more options, especially given the successes so far. First, the two organizations share the same objective to provide recreational and play opportunities for parents and their children, with the only difference that Abby Dads is focused on parents who are fathers. Second, fathers participating in Abby Dads would like a wider variety of recreation activities – this was their most common suggestion for improvement. Third, father-focused activities in the community will help to bring wider visibility to Abby Dads in all that it does for fathers. Both Dads and Kids at Play and the swimming lessons have attracted the attention of general community members using the same facilities. Finally, when staff from Abby Dads and Parks & Recreation work together on an activity, Abby Dads staff are mentoring the Parks & Recreation staff on how to promote healthy father involvement, rather than just providing a fun activity for children. Eventually, with enough mentoring, Parks & Recreation staff will be able to run activities for fathers and children without a Abby Dads staff worker present, yet maintain a Abby Dads-like focus.

While Parks & Recreation is the best candidate for extending a community partnership, there are other organizations with an existing connection with Abby Dads. Central Abbotsford Community School, for example, has worked with Abby Dads for several years on the Celebrating Dads (Father's Day) committee, and has been interested in hosting recreational activities for fathers and children. These good intentions have been thwarted until now by limitations in how these new activities would be resourced.

6. Consider using more volunteers to help in the delivery of open group programming.

Volunteerism is commonplace in many non-profit programs, some of which would not be sustainable otherwise. In the history of Abby Dads, there have been few volunteers, and not much outreach into the community to seek such help. Some of this reticence comes from concerns about the time needed to find, arrange, supervise and coordinate volunteers. Given the small allocation of supervisory hours for the whole program, this is understandable. However, there are several compelling reasons to consider active recruitment of volunteers.

Some programs (e.g., hockey and My Daddy and Me) often have large numbers of participants in a session, making the ratio of staff to fathers quite high. It would simply make it easier to manage these activities with more help, as was the case in the past when hockey, for example, was attended by both father support workers. It would also provide staff coverage in the event of an injury that required medical attention. If a volunteer had been available for My Daddy and Me, the South Asian support worker who was used there in a relief role could have used his time to develop programming ideas for South Asian fathers.

Volunteers taken from students in social services programs, like the one at the University of the Fraser Valley, would be mutually beneficial. Abby Dads would be getting volunteers with (developing) professional helping skills, and the volunteer would be gaining useful career-related experience. The requirement of such programs to do relevant practicums would ensure an ongoing supply of these high-quality volunteers. The ranks of former Abby

Dads participants provide another very fruitful avenue for volunteer help. Indeed, several long-standing but current Abby Dads fathers, in their interviews, expressed a desire to “give back” to the program. There are almost certainly a number of successful “graduates” of Abby Dads that, if contacted, would be delighted to be called upon to assist. Of course, having such volunteers would be especially helpful for the current participants, who are in a program steeped in a philosophy of mentored father identity.

Volunteers could also be sought from the community at large. Perhaps service organizations such as Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis could be targeted. A long-standing and well-developed program like Abby Dads would certainly appeal to the sensibilities of many business and community leaders who also happen to be fathers. These connections would simultaneously enrich the visibility of the program in the community, provide a new category of role models (and life opportunities) for Abby Dads participants, and perhaps create some new possibilities for program funding.

7. Look within ACS to share program responsibilities, where appropriate.

There are some program responsibilities of Abby Dads staff that are less specific to father involvement than others, and thus could be seen as responsibilities that could be better coordinated or delivered in conjunction with other ACS programs. The example of seeking and responding to requests for proposals has already been mentioned. Currently, each program within ACS does its own independent search for potential funders. Resources like online directories are usually not specific to one particular program within ACS, and so much effort is duplicated in these parallel activities. In addition, potential collaborations between ACS programs are less obvious when searching for potential funders this way. If ACS programs found a way to share the responsibility for fundraising, Abby Dads and other programs would benefit.

Family Justice seminars are another example of a Abby Dads responsibility that should be shared with other ACS programs. While the original grant from the Law Foundation primarily emphasized the benefits to fathers with child custody or access issues, the seminars in reality have always been events for the whole community, drawing many mothers as well as others like grandparents. Due to its ongoing popularity, these seminars have continued past the point where the associated costs were funded, with plans to hold them semi-annually for the indefinite future. In the past two years, the number of brief contacts to Abby Dads has ballooned, and about half of these contacts have been family justice-related. The result is that a disproportionate amount of staff time is being spent on an Abby Dads activity that is more community-oriented than father-oriented. One way to ease this burden would be for family justice issues to be more widely shared within ACS. The Anti-Poverty and Advocacy Division of ACS, for example, would be a particularly good fit to share family justice issues in the community.

8. Optimize the online visibility of Abby Dads using the abbydads.ca website and Facebook

The structure and use of the abbydads.ca website could both be improved, to the benefit of the program. More information about the program on the index page would encourage a greater number of naïve browsers to view the more detailed pages that follow. Regular monitoring of usage statistics would be a useful way to track the effects of marketing and publicity.

The Abbotsford Father Involvement Program Facebook page provides a good way for people to find the program within a Facebook search. The main page should be updated to provide all relevant program information, including current contact information and program descriptions. One of the two personal (i.e., support worker) Facebook pages has been mostly inactive since shortly after its inception. Given that younger fathers (and partners) are frequent users of social networking, it would be helpful to relaunch (and rename) that page to provide these Abby Dads participants with the opportunity to network on Facebook.

9. *As Abby Dads evolves, maintain an unwavering focus on its philosophy of hands-on mentoring.*

Abby Dads is grounded in its logic model and associated philosophy of mentoring men to be fathers. It is certainly true that this philosophy is eminently transportable and teachable to other father involvement programs. In concert with the Coordinator of the Father Involvement Network of British Columbia, the senior Abby Dads Support Worker has done many workshops around the province to teach the “tricks of the trade” that make Abby Dads so unique and successful. A roundtable discussion on this topic was also held in 2008 as part of a Father Involvement Research Alliance conference in Toronto. These dissemination processes need to continue, as funding allows.

Recently, in response to reduced Abby Dads staff hours due to funding shortfalls, a strategy was suggested to devote more of the Abby Dads staff’s time to mentoring community partners in the Abby Dads philosophy and methods. The intention of this mentoring would be to eventually turn some Abby Dads activities over completely to be run by the community. Theoretically, this would preserve and perhaps expand the number of fathers benefitting from Abby Dads-like activities, since the limitation would no longer be the number of funded hours available for Abby Dads staff to personally run these activities. It has been suggested that this process of community ownership has already happened for events like Celebrating Dads.

However, there are limits to this model of disseminating the Abby Dads philosophy of mentoring. It has the potential to undercut the aspects of the program that fathers find most compelling and father-friendly – their personal connections with Abby Dads staff, who are experienced experts on how to mentor Abby Dads participants to identify as fathers. This even extends to the partners of the participating fathers, who trust the Abby Dads support workers to teach the fathers the right things, so the dads will become positively engaged as parents and partners.

Therefore, when extending the philosophy of mentoring out into the community, care needs to be taken that the essence of Abby Dads is not endangered in the process. There are some programs, such as Dads and Kids at Play, where the emphasis is more on recreation, even with the father involvement component. Some DKAP participants, even regular ones, may not really be aware that they are participating in a larger father involvement program. Those are the programs to consider first in terms of turning the activity completely over to workers outside of Abby Dads. No matter how difficult the funding situation becomes, new strategies for program delivery must first answer this question: what could the fathers lose in terms of what has made the program work so well for all of these years?

Appendix A: Posttest Father Interview

Demographic Questions

Name _____

Date: _____

How old are you?

- Under 20 35-39
 20-24 40-44
 25-29 45 and above
 30-34

What is your highest level of education?

- Some high school
 High school graduate
 Trade or vocational school
 Some college or university
 College certificate or diploma
 University degree or higher
 Other (please specify) _____

What best describes your current form of employment? (choose all that apply to you)

- I work full time
 I work part-time
 I am a student
 I'm unemployed and looking for work
 I'm unemployed and not looking for work
 Other (please specify) _____

How many children do you have?

_____ children

What are their ages and gender, starting with the youngest?

	Age	Gender	
Child 1 (youngest)	_____	<input type="radio"/> Female	<input type="radio"/> Male
Child 2	_____	<input type="radio"/> Female	<input type="radio"/> Male
Child 3	_____	<input type="radio"/> Female	<input type="radio"/> Male
Child 4 (oldest)	_____	<input type="radio"/> Female	<input type="radio"/> Male

Besides you, who else lives in your household?

- All of my children
- Some of my children
- Partner / spouse
- Your parent(s)
- Other family members
- Friends
- Boarders
- Other (please specify) _____

Questions for non-resident fathers only

How many days per week do you usually see your youngest child?

_____ days per week

How many hours per week do you usually provide care for your youngest child?

_____ hours per week

How involved do you want to be in raising your child(ren)?

- Very involved
- Quite involved
- Fairly involved
- Not very involved
- Not involved

What type of child support agreement do you have with your child's mother?

- Legal agreement
- Informal agreement
- No agreement

How much are you supposed to pay for child support per month?

\$ _____ per month

How much did you pay last month for child support?

\$ _____

How often do you provide financial support to your child for each of the following things?

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	N/A
Clothes, toys, diapers, presents for child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Child's medicines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Child care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Extra money to mother to help out	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Evaluation Questions to Ask Fathers Relating to the Abbotsford Fathering Program

How did you first hear about the fathering program?

When did you first get involved with the fathering program?

Which of the activities offered by the Fathering program have you been involved in? For each, how many times have you participated since September? (prompt for other activities)

- My Daddy and Me (Saturday mornings) _____
- Monday Night Hockey _____
- Anger Awareness Workshop _____
- Family Justice Seminar _____
- Best for Babies _____
- Nobody's Perfect _____
- Individual counselling – informal _____
- Individual counselling – formal _____
- Dads and Kids at Play _____
- Other activities _____

From your perspective, what are the strengths of the fathering program? How does it help you and the other fathers?

How could the fathering program work better - for your needs, and for other fathers' needs?

When you first got involved with the program, what sorts of benefits/changes were you hoping to get from participating? (use prompts based on activities)

To what extent has participating in the program helped you with these benefits/changes? Please give examples of how you have benefited/changed.

What other (unexpected) benefits/changes have you gotten from participating in the program? (use prompts)

For those benefits/changes you hoped for, but haven't yet achieved, what have been the obstacles to getting these benefits/changes?

How has your concept of what it means to be a father changed since starting the program?

Engagement with Child

Please answer the following questions with regards to **your youngest child**.

When you are with your child, how often do you usually do the following things?

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>N/A</i>
Read books to your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tell stories to your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Play indoor games with your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Watch television with your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Play together outdoors with your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Change diapers/help your child use the toilet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prepare meals or bottles for child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hug and kiss your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wash or bathe your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Help your child to bed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Help your child dress him/herself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Help your child brush his/her teeth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eat evening meal with your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach her/him to do things independently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Take your child to a community get together	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Get together with other dads	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visit with your family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have you visited the library with your child in the past month?

- No Yes

Fathering Perceptions/Identity

People have to play different roles in life. How important is each of the following roles for you? Show me by dividing up 40 pennies into the following four roles:

- Parent
- Spouse
- Worker
- Other

Fathers do many things for their children. Please show how important each of the following five roles is to you by dividing up 50 pennies.

- Custodial (i.e., daily needs, such as bathing, dressing, preparing meals)
- Teaching (e.g., helping child learn new things)
- Social/emotional (e.g., showing love and affection)
- Breadwinning (i.e., meeting financial responsibilities)
- Guardianship (e.g., keeping child safe and healthy)

How do you feel about yourself as a father? (Choose the one response that fits best)

- I'm not very good at being a father.
- I have some trouble being a father.
- I am an average father.
- I am a better than average father.
- I am a very good father.

Interactions with Partner

How much influence do you currently have in making major decisions about your child's:

	No influence	Some influence	A lot of influence	N/A
Discipline	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Nutrition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Health care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Child care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How much influence would you like to have in making major decisions about your child's:

	No influence	Some influence	A lot of influence	N/A
Discipline	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Nutrition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Health care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Child care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How well do you get along with the mother of your youngest child?

- We get along very well.
- We generally get along pretty well.
- We don't get along too well.
- We fight a lot and do not get along at all well.
- We avoid seeing each other.

How frequently do you have arguments with your child's mother about each of the following?

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	N/A
Chores and responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How to raise your child(ren)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How money is spent on the child(ren)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time father spends with child(ren)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial contribution to child support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Where child lives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How do you typically handle serious disagreements with your child's mother?

- Keeping my opinions to myself
- Arguing and shouting
- Compromising
- Walking out
- Discussing calmly
- Hitting, throwing things
- Criticizing
- Other

Feeling Connected

Outside of your activities with the Fathering Involvement Program, have you participated in any community activities in the past year? (e.g., volunteering, coaching, playing sports, church functions)

- No Yes --- Which community activities? _____

Were these activities with your children or on your own?

How important are your religious beliefs in influencing how you raise your child?

- Very important Quite important Somewhat important Not important
- I do not have any religious beliefs

How important are your cultural beliefs and practices in influencing how you raise your child?

- Very important Quite important Somewhat important Not important
- I do not have any cultural beliefs and practices

Appendix B: Partners' Focus Group

Date: _____

Time: (60 – 75 mins) _____

Location: _____

Welcome:

- introduction of Barry & Nerida
- brief explanation of FIP evaluation

Preliminary Instructions

- confidentiality (ours & theirs)
- safe place to communicate
- invitation to discuss sensitive issues directly with Barry / Nerida by phone as opposed to sharing with larger group
- focus on the program, not the fathers

Introductions: Invite group to introduce themselves, how many children, how long they've been part of New Beginnings, how long their partners have been involved with FIP.

Questions:

1. What sort of benefits/changes were you hoping your partner would get from participating?
2. How has your children benefited by your partner's participation in the program?
3. How has your relationship with your partner benefited by his participation in the program?
4. What are the strengths of the FIP program? How does it help fathers?
5. How could the fathering program work better – for his needs, and for other father's needs?
6. How has the concept of what it means to be a father changed within your family since starting the program?

Wrap Up

- thanks for participating
- any questions?
- invitation to call Barry or Nerida with any questions, concerns or insights

F. Overall, did this session meet your expectations?

Yes No

Please feel free to add any additional comments and to use the back of this sheet if you run out of room. Thanks. Jeff McLean and Ed Friesen, Father Involvement Programming, Abbotsford Community Services.

Appendix D

Questions For Other BC Father Involvement Programs

1. How long has your program been active in your community?
2. How much contact do you have with other father involvement programs in BC?
3. How have these contacts helped to shape your program (e.g., staff roles, activities, funding, administration)?
4. What activities do you offer fathers in your program?
5. For each of the following program goals, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1= not at all a focus, 3 = a minor focus, 5 = a major focus) please rate how much your program's activities focus directly on that goal for the fathers in your program.
 - A. Fathers learn the necessary skills to be effective parents.
 - B. Fathers learn to identify with the role of "father."
 - C. Fathers feel more connected with other fathers.
 - D. Fathers feel supported around overcoming father-unrelated obstacles in their lives (e.g., housing, employment, substance use, anger management).
 - E. Fathers feel supported around overcoming father-related obstacles in their lives (e.g., family justice issues, relationship with children's mother).
 - F. Community professionals gain a better appreciation of how to support the needs of fathers
6. How is your fathering program currently funded?
7. Does that differ from previous years? If yes, how so?
8. How secure is your program funding from year to year?
9. How would you characterize your confidence in the financial stability of your program?
10. What strategies have you used in the past few years to enhance financial sustainability?
11. Besides seeking additional sources of funding, what other strategies do you think would be effective in optimizing the stability of the program over time?

Appendix E

New Beginnings Father Involvement Program

Evaluation Progress Report, Year 1

Barry Forer and Iraj Poureslami

August 2008

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Introduction

The Father Involvement Program (FIP) is one component of the New Beginnings program offered by Abbotsford Community Services (ACS). Since its establishment in 1997 with a relatively modest mandate to support the fathers of pregnant or parenting female adolescents attending the New Beginnings high school classroom, the Father Involvement Program has become increasingly autonomous, with a steady expansion in terms of services offered and the range of fathers involved. While the program is still focused on fathers of children not yet in school (though this is changing), there is no restriction on the age of fathers that can participate. Currently, the program offers individual support, Nobody's Perfect parenting skills sessions, fathers-only recreation (weekly ball hockey and softball, a summer canoe trip), anger awareness workshops, a weekly breakfast playgroup for fathers and their young children, male co-facilitation of Best for Babies (a high-risk pregnancy program), occasional Family Justice seminars, and an annual Father's Day event.

Abbotsford Community Services successfully applied to the Vancouver Foundation to fund a three-year project with four goals:

5. Increased connections between fathers and their children aged 0 to 10 years, with particular emphasis on single fathers, part-time fathers, and South Asian-identified fathers.
6. Increased connections between fathers to reduce father isolation.
7. Increased community inclusiveness of fathers.
8. To conduct an external evaluation of the Father Involvement Program, with the results disseminated to interested BC communities.

In the funding proposal, the fourth goal (the external evaluation) listed three objectives:

4. To develop a steering committee to guide the evaluation process, with membership to include representatives of the ACS Early Childhood and Family Resource department, the coordinator of New Beginnings, FIN-BC, the BC Council for Families, and the two external evaluators for the project (Barry Forer and Iraj Poureslami).
5. To develop a formative and summative evaluation plan based on the current logic model and the Father Involvement Program plan.
6. To document the evaluation findings in an accessible manner for other groups interested in fathering programs. To disseminate the findings through five provincial and/or pan-Canadian conference presentations.

Evaluation Workplan and Timetable

With the guidance of the steering committee, a three-year evaluation workplan and timetable was developed and approved. The evaluation workplan is divided into six components, each with several subcomponents. Each is briefly described below.

The first component is a formative evaluation of program processes, and focuses on documentation processes, the recruitment and retention of fathers, program components and linkages between them, and human resource issues. The second component is a summative evaluation of the impacts of the Father Involvement program, particularly on the fathers themselves, but also potentially on their children and families, and on the community. The evaluation of impacts on fathers is based on assessing fathers before and after participation in the program, with careful consideration of other factors that could weaken the attribution of changes to the effect of the program. Impact on fathers is being considered quite broadly, encompassing aspects such as reaching (or progressing towards) agreed-upon goals with regards to such things as: involvement with children, involvement with mothers, reduced isolation, reduced risk factors, and increased feelings of self-efficacy. Since fathers participate

in the program with differing intensity and patterns of involvement, impact assessment will have to take this wide diversity into account as much as possible.

The third component of the evaluation involves a feasibility study for the development of increased participation of Indo-Canadian fathers in the program, followed by a process evaluation of the development of the program (should it be assessed as feasible), with the possibility (though unlikely) of the beginnings of a summative assessment of the implemented program by the end of the third year of the evaluation. The results of this feasibility assessment are written up in a separate report.

The fourth component is an evaluation of the new aspects of programming that were described in the project goals, as well as those already in the planning or early implementation stages at the start of the project. Four programming aspects are included in this evaluation: the Family Justice seminars, involvement of fathers with children from age 6 to 10, involvement of single and part-time fathers, and the abbydads.ca website.

The fifth evaluation component is a study of how to optimize program sustainability, through an assessment of funding structures, community networking, administration practices, and general community perceptions about the importance of father involvement. The final component focuses on the dissemination of the evaluation findings, and is concerned with determining the most effective methods to facilitate wide-ranging discussion, both geographically and philosophically.

Data Collection

In the first year of the evaluation, data were collected from a variety of sources including:

- FIP documents, including annual and quarterly reports for the past three years, forms for the various activities (intake, activity sheets, waiver of liability, individual service plans, etc.), the Policies and Procedure Manual for Father Involvement Programming, the Program Logic Model, Results of Participant Feedback, newspaper clippings, and completed ISP forms.
- Individual and group interviews with the ACS Manager for Early Childhood and Family Resources, the Program Coordinator/Supervisor, the Father Support and Resource Workers, and the Fathers' Food Coordinator.
- Individual interviews with seven fathers.
- Individual and group interviews with staff at a variety of social service agencies offering services to Indo-Canadian families.
- Observation of participants at recreational ball hockey, Family Justice seminar, Celebrating Dads event, My Daddy and Me.
- Review of literature relating to multicultural fathering and the measuring father involvement.
- Analysis of 2001 and 2006 Census data relating to visible minority trends in Abbotsford.

Findings

Component 1: Review of program processes

Documentation

There has been much more of a “documentation culture” at the FIP in recent years, particularly during the tenure of the current Program Supervisor. This is a reflection of the growth of the program in terms of number of activities offered, number of participants, and staffing requirements – i.e., documents as a way of keeping track. It also reflects the maturation of the program, with its increasing autonomy from its roots in the New Beginnings Program, and an evolving understanding of the FIP’s unique sense of purpose – i.e., documents as a way to establish one’s identity. Finally, sufficient and up-to-date documentation is recognized for its importance for accreditation and funding – i.e., documents as a means of achieving sustainability. The current level of documentation has allowed more accurate tracking of father participation, and other outputs such as data about satisfaction with program activities. These data can then be easily summarized for quarterly and annual reports.

The current list of forms is as follows:

- ACS Rights and Responsibilities
- ACS File Review Form
- ACS Program Logic and Outcomes
- Anger Awareness Group Agreement
- Anger Awareness Evaluation Feedback
- Camping Waiver of Liability and Emergency Contact Form
- Case/Contact Notes
- Celebrating Dads Evaluation Feedback
- Client Individual Service Plan
- Code of Conduct (hockey)
- Confidentiality and Consent to Services
- Consent for the Release or Exchange of Confidential Information
- Discharge Summary
- Family Justice Seminar Evaluation – Participants
- Family Justice Seminar Evaluation - Professionals

- Father Involvement Feedback Form
- Fathers Quarterly Reporting Sheet
- Group Attendance Log Sheet
- Hockey Contact and Waiver of Liability Form
- Hockey Sign-in Sheet
- Hockey Evaluation Feedback
- My Daddy and Me Contact and Waiver of Liability Form
- My Daddy and Me Sign-in Sheet
- My Daddy and Me Activities Sheet
- New Beginnings Father Intake and Screening
- Nobody's Perfect Evaluation Feedback
- Orientation Checklist
- Referral to Fathers' Support Worker – Risk factors
- Referrals In and Out of Fathering Program

New forms are created when new program activities are added (e.g., Family Justice Evaluation Feedback) or revised when modifications are needed (e.g., adding evaluator names to confidentiality and consent forms). Discussions about modifying forms occur as needed, or during regular staff meetings. When modifications or new forms are needed, the task is assigned to one (or another) staff member, who creates a draft version for feedback from the rest of the staff (and currently, from the evaluators as well). FIP staff consult with the Clinical Director of Support Services at ACS about what is necessary to ensure that forms adequately address issues of liability, confidentiality, and consent.

The ultimate usefulness of documentation depends both on the extent to which the forms collectively address all of the necessary content areas (i.e., no gaps in the information needed), and how well the collected data are kept up to date. On both counts, the FIP staff should be commended, especially given the amount of “paperwork” that this entails. The comprehensive (and growing) list of forms shown above, and the collaborative process for revising/creating forms attest to a healthy documentation system. An analysis of any gaps in the forms’ content areas is currently underway as part of this evaluation, and will be reported on in the Year 2 evaluation report. Inspection of the overall FIP database for the 2007/08 year shows that it is up-to-date and essentially complete.

Recruitment and retention

Using the typical definition of recruitment as the number of new fathers that participate in the program each year in any capacity, the FIP has been increasingly successful in the past few years. In 2006/07, there were 93 participants who were not involved in the previous year. According to the recent 2007/08 report, this year this has more than doubled, to 188 new participants. Retention, on the other hand, shows a completely different pattern. In 2006/07, 50 fathers (35% of all participants) carried over their participation from the previous year. In 2007/08, this was true for 44 fathers (19% of all participants). Therefore, the overall pattern is one of increasing recruitment (and overall number of participating fathers), and declining retention.

Recruitment activities have historically been influenced by staffing considerations. For most of the history of the FIP, there was only one staff person, which limited the attention that could be spent on increasing recruitment through promotion activities. In addition, the original funding for father involvement was based on the notion that a portion of the New Beginnings young parent program funding should go towards young father involvement, with the idea of reducing domestic violence by making support more equitable for fathers and mothers. Thus, recruitment was originally restricted to fathers under age 25. Recruitment numbers increased with the advent of funding for two staff, as this has allowed for more program activities (e.g., Family Justice seminars, the Build-Off), more involvement of father support staff as facilitators in programs offered by other agencies (e.g., Best for Babies, Welcome Baby) which attracts more fathers to attend, and more time for promotional work (e.g., developing and maintaining the abbydads.ca website, creating new FIP brochures). In addition, since being involved as facilitators of the Nobody's Perfect parenting program, the percentage of fathers has steadily increased to nearly 50% of participants at the last session. Best for Babies is now a major source of new recruits for the FIP; there were 55 fathers in this program in 2007/08, compared to four in 2004/05.

Also, the philosophy of the program has continued to evolve over its history, which affects both recruitment and retention. It has been the experience of the staff that “hard-sell” approaches (for recruitment, retention, or to encourage particular forms of participation, such as individual counselling) do not generally work very well for men, who prefer to initiate and maintain participation on their own terms. Other, more nuanced approaches have been much more effective. Indeed, these “tricks of the trade” will be the subject of a FIP presentation at the upcoming Father Involvement Research Alliance (FIRA) conference in Toronto in October, 2008. Generally speaking, however, the program philosophy is that recruitment and retention should be father-initiated, with fathers not rule-bound to any commitments within the program. The role of staff is to provide information about program activities, opportunities to participate, and a consistently welcoming attitude.

This philosophy has implications for how retention is regarded. Since fathers use the program as much as they want, and come and go as needed, retention is less of a goal than recruitment. Once a father has met his goals, whatever they may be, there is (almost) no reason for the program to encourage him to stay. Indeed, given the staffing limitations, the best way to accommodate a continual influx of new participants is to minimize setting retention goals. Of course, it would also be anathema to the philosophy of the program to encourage any participants to leave to make room for others. Similarly, the intent of the program is not crisis intervention, as evidenced by the welcoming attitude whatever the reason for participation.

However, this points to a potential “rub” of the program philosophy in putting the onus on fathers for joining or maintaining participation. When staff identify fathers with obvious needs that could be helped by the program (e.g., with custody, anger management, isolation, addiction), it can be argued that this establishes a need to pursue participation to some degree, even when fathers are not interested. Similarly, when a participating father drops out of the FIP, particularly when important identified goals have not been met, there may be responsibilities for following up that are inherent in the relationship established during participation. Of course, staff routinely encourage participation and maintain relationships, but

there are limitations to the time available to work with individual fathers, and fathers remain the ultimate arbiters of their participation in the program.

One ongoing evaluation task is the assessment of the extent to which retention is related to the kinds of activities in which fathers participate or the level of support needs. If, for instance, retention was higher for fathers with the most risk factors at the outset of participation, this would support the notion of a good balance between father- and staff-initiated participation.

Program components and outputs

Through its well-developed system of documentation, the FIP collects detailed output statistics for all program components. These are summarized in the FIP Annual Report each year, most recently in the 2007/08 report that was just released. A newly-configured logic model for the program, which can be found on page 5 of the current report, clearly lays out the components of the program, and how each component is associated with particular implementation objectives, measured outputs, linking constructs, and short- and long-term expected outcomes. There are three general types of program components: individual support, closed group programming, and open group programming. Individual support ranges from brief contacts by phone or e-mail up to individualized support for those fathers most at risk. Closed group programming refers to curriculum-based sessions, and includes Anger Awareness Workshops, Nobody's Perfect, Best for Babies, and Welcome Baby. Open group programming includes: 1) recreational activities such as hockey, softball, and a canoe camping trip, 2) information programs such as Family Justice Seminars, and 3) play opportunities for dads and their children, such as My Daddy and Me and the Celebrating Dads event on Father's Day.

As detailed in the annual report, program outputs increased from the previous year in almost every programming area. Overall, 232 fathers participated in FIP programming, up from 143 fathers in 2006/07 (62% increase), and up from 96 fathers three years earlier. There were large increases in father participation in the last year for many components, such as: Welcome Baby

(217% increase), Best for Babies (120%), Nobody's Perfect (71%), opening individual support files (55%), Anger Awareness sessions (50%), and ball hockey (33%). The only component with a declining trend in participation was My Daddy and Me (26% decrease). Family Justice Information sessions were a new addition to FIP programming; two sessions attracted a total of 56 participants, equally split between men and women.

When asked to identify gaps in programming, FIP staff focused on four main areas. The first is concerned with boundaries of support – where staff's capacity to help directly is limited by their current level of training and expertise. This applies to areas such as counselling and mediation. When there is staff turnover, new staff bring with them different capacities. For instance, Anger Awareness sessions have benefited from the training and expertise of the new Father Support and Resource Worker. The second identified gap was in providing 24-hour coverage, particularly for crisis intervention. This gap may have been narrowed by changing from an individual/group model, where only one staff member is qualified to intervene, to a shared support and resource model, where both staff can intervene. The third gap is a lack of a holistic family orientation generally, and a lack of evening programming designed for family relationships in particular. Finally, staff would like more opportunities to upgrade their skills through professional development.

Program linkages and philosophy

In order to understand the philosophy of the FIP and how it translates into program linkages, a good starting point are the assumptions about the unique characteristics of father involvement programs. Participation in fathering programs, unlike other parent programs, takes a long time to build, and then a constant effort to maintain. Because men tend not to have the same easy communication channels that women do, fathering programs typically get established one dad at a time. Even then, participation is very fluid, with fathers leaving and re-entering according to their own needs and life circumstances. This immediately points to the importance of weaving together group activities and individual support within the program. Group activities are a draw into the program, reduce feelings of isolation, and expose fathers to all of the

program components, including individual support within the FIP and potential referral to needed supports at other agencies. Thus, group programming plays an essential role, and is probably the most efficient way to meet the needs of the greatest number of fathers. Recently, with the change in staff and their associated roles, there has been a greater emphasis placed on group activities and less on intensive individual support, because of this perceived efficiency.

Besides being aware of the characteristics of fathers, effective program linkages also depend on specifying the logic model for the program. The newly-revised FIP logic model specifies the program's objectives, inputs, outputs, and short- and long-term outcomes. The "linking constructs" part of the logic model specifies the measurable changes that lead to improved outcomes for fathers. One of the major benefits of having a logic model is that it makes clear how the program should be evaluated, from both formative and summative perspectives.

The current logic model, recently revised by the Program Coordinator, has not yet been reviewed with the program staff as part of the evaluation. Such a review would be very germane to the formative evaluation, and will be conducted in the early fall of 2008. In the meantime, based on discussions with program staff about how the program is intended to work, there appears to be some room for further development of the logic model. Specifically, the logic model does not acknowledge that an important goal of the program is to initiate participants (particularly isolated and/or young fathers), often retroactively, into what it means for a man to take on the role of father. The program emphasis is on connecting with other fathers to achieve this identity formation. The program provides the male culture that is lacking in their lives, and so, in a way, it fathers these fathers. From this perspective, self-identification as a part of a community of fathers is a prerequisite for other positive changes, whether in terms of parenting, family relationships, addictions, or employment. This program emphasis is missing from the "linking constructs" part of the model, and could even be added to the short-term outcomes, which currently focuses a lot on parenting. Of course, the program does include a number of activities relating to parenting skills and child development, but the

model needs to show the linkages to building connections to father identity through the facilitation efforts of the male program staff.

There is a consensus among those involved with the FIP that the ultimate goals for the program participants relate to healthy father-child relationships and healthy development of the children, as set out in the logic model. As part of the summative evaluation, it will be important to assess whether there is an association between an increasing “dose” of program components and improved outcomes for fathers, for father-child relationships, and for children. This will be a test of the efficacy of the initial focus on father identity formation.

Human resource issues

It has been the good fortune for the evaluation (though naturally disruptive for the FIP) that there has been some staff turnover in the past year. Specifically, the person who was the Father’s Resource Worker, whose job it was to facilitate group activities, left the program in the fall of 2007 to pursue further education. After one unsuccessful attempt to hire someone to fill this group facilitation role, the job description was reconfigured to combine elements of both a Father Support Worker and Father Resource Worker, at a higher wage (but 23 hours per week instead of 35), and requiring an applicant with more education and experience than the departed staff member. Three applicants were interviewed, and the new staff member was hired at the end of 2007. The whole process has been a good opportunity for the program staff and the evaluators to examine the strengths and challenges of various staffing models.

Historically, it is only quite recently that the FIP could afford two full-time Father Workers. When there was only one staff person, there was no need to think about how best to split the job roles. With a second staff member, a staffing model evolved that essentially split the responsibilities into individual support and group facilitation. A group facilitation role suited the second staff member better, both because of his strong rapport-building ability, and due to his relative lack of training in areas related to providing individual support. It made sense for the individual support role to remain with the Father Support Worker, who already had the

required counselling skills, years of experience, and a proven track record of working successfully with fathers in the program. It must also be mentioned that individual support is only one of the Father Support Worker's responsibilities, which also include leadership in most of the group-oriented programming, including Best for Babies, Anger Awareness groups, Monday night hockey, and the annual canoe trip.

The two staff members worked well together, but there were aspects of the individual/group model that created tensions. Some higher-risk fathers expressed a desire to receive their individual support from the Father Resource Worker (or at least to confide in him) rather than be referred to the Father Support Worker, as was required by the model. Most fathers' initial contact with the FIP is through a group activity, and so they often got to know the Father Resource Worker, but not necessarily the Father Support Worker. For the Father Resource Worker, it was frustrating to not be able to provide individual help, especially when some fathers ended up not getting support because they did not go on to pursue a supportive relationship with the Father Support Worker. However, without the proper training qualifications, providing individual help was not a possibility for the Father Resource Worker, and would threaten the accreditation of the program. For the Father Support Worker, it was frustrating that he was no longer as much the "face" of the program, which exacerbated these lost support opportunities. Also, group activities are inherently more fun and energizing than providing individual support, which is more difficult and energy-intensive.

The individual/group model also brought to the fore the issue of how to maintain confidentiality. Besides the ethical imperative, confidentiality is practically important because it allows staff to get the information they need to be effective in their jobs. With the individual/group model, conflicts arose between maintaining confidentiality and allowing staff members to communicate about particular fathers. Essentially, the issue is the extent to which the group facilitation person should have access to confidential details about fathers involved in group activities. The FIP up until now has taken a strong position about restricting confidential information flow in this situation. However, now that the staffing model has

shifted (partly due to the qualifications of the new staff person) to one based on sharing the group and individual duties, the issue of sharing confidential information should be formally revisited.

The new staff person has the education and experience to allow the FIP to move to a model where both Father Workers can theoretically provide both group facilitation and individual support. With a strong background in services for clients with addictions and anger issues, the new staff member provides some expertise that was lacking previously. New skills are important, as they allow more types of support to be offered within the FIP program, with less frequent need to refer fathers to other social services. The FIP has always been very clear about not trying to provide support beyond the limitations of the staff's qualifications. More equal sharing of group facilitation has also been welcomed by the more senior Father Worker, as a way to connect with more fathers from the start, to have more fun, and because of the greater scope of support that can be offered to fathers.

In the first few months of work, the new Father Worker is at the beginning of forming relationships with fathers, both as individuals and in group activities, and realizes that forming these bonds takes time. This was the lesson learned by the senior Father Support Worker and the departed Father Resource Worker, both of whom gained acceptance slowly, and only after learning to adjust their initial expectations. One potential challenge in having two Father Support Workers providing individual support is the problem of "playing favourites." This was one of the reasons why the individual/group model was originally chosen. However, this challenge can be positively reframed as fathers having twice the likelihood of finding someone who is a good "fit" for them. Another potential challenge for the new Father Worker in providing individual support is the part-time nature of his job. As more fathers seek him out for support, his time will become more stretched. Should more funding become available to hire him full-time, this challenge would be met. However, given that he already has other part-time employment commitments, it is unclear whether he would want full-time FIP work.

Even so, extra funding could be used to hire yet another staff person to fulfil some of the group facilitation requirements of the program.

Program coordination/supervision is another aspect of the FIP that is evolving, though more slowly. Even though the FIP is becoming more and more autonomous from New Beginnings, program coordination and supervision is still conducted within the New Beginnings framework. FIP coordination accounts for about one-quarter of the New Beginnings Coordinator's time. The Coordinator understands and appreciates the FIP culture as a "men's group," and so has a different supervision style than she has with the women's programs. Currently, one idea that is being discussed is that the senior Father Support Worker consider taking on the supervisory role for the FIP. The resulting greater independence of the FIP could have the salutary effect of helping funders to understand the direct benefits of father involvement programming. This, in turn, could enhance the sustainability of the FIP in the future.

Component 2: Success of current programming

Impact on fathers

Before the evaluation started, there was already a father feedback process in place at the FIP, in the form of a self-report questionnaire. The 2006 and 2007 versions asked different sets of questions, but both included items about how the program is running, items relating to satisfaction, and items about program impacts. In both years, there were 24 respondents to the feedback forms. The category choices were summarized, and the open-ended responses were reported verbatim. Taken together, these items (and the responses) formed the starting point for considering what a formal summative evaluation might look like.

The following "impact" items were asked in the last two years. For the 2006 items, fathers were asked to explain if they answered "yes."

- Has your knowledge and awareness of fathering issues and needs changed or increased? (2006)
- Are you now more involved in your children's lives? (2006)
- Has coming to these programs helped you feel less isolated? (2006)
- Have you changed your views about the importance of father's roles in families? (2006)
- Do you know what services are available, where to go and how to access those services? (2006)
- Do you think you have increased your knowledge and skill level regarding children's activities and behaviours? (2006)
- Have you had any opportunities to develop friends within the program? (2006)
- Are you doing healthy active activities for yourself and your children? (2006)
- Since attending the fathers' program I would say that the greatest change I've noticed as a father is that I _____. (2007)

One of the primary thrusts for funding an FIP evaluation is to provide an opportunity to measure, in a systematic way, something about the immediate and short-term impacts of the program. First (temporally at least) among these impacts is the success of the program on the fathers themselves, in all of the various outcomes shown in the logic model. It is assumed that the impact of the program on fathers' children and families will be both consequent and subsequent to having successful outcomes for the father. To a large extent, the impact of the program on encouraging father-friendly agencies, institutions, and communities is separate from having an impact on the father participants themselves.

It goes without saying that it is very challenging to design an internally valid study on the impacts of the FIP. There are many components of the program, and fathers may participate in just one, or all of them. There is also great variability in the number of times that fathers participate, from playing hockey once to taking the Anger Awareness Workshop every time it is offered. Therefore, the intensity of participation is both extremely variable and multidimensional. Even if some "FIP dosage" formula could be created, there is no readymade comparison group available against which to objectively assess the impact of the program. The only available comparison group is the fathers themselves, with the outcomes

measured at the start of the program and at some natural endpoint. This design is called a one-group pretest-posttest design, and is regarded as weak, given that changes over time may be due to other factors besides the program, such as maturation, other events or interventions at the same time as the program, familiarity with the measurement tools, or even regression towards the mean. On the bright side, selection biases are not an issue, as long as the same participants are evaluated both times.

In addition to varying intensity of participation, and internal validity issues, validity of the measurement tools is also a challenge. Ideally, impacts would be measured using reliable and valid observational tools wherever appropriate. However, for a whole host of reasons (mostly about time, cost, and ethical concerns), self-report methods were chosen as the appropriate type of tool to measure impacts. After discussion with program staff, it was also decided that the data from these measures would be gathered using face-to-face personal interviews, rather than self-completed questionnaires. Interviews have several important advantages over questionnaires that are particularly relevant to this evaluation, including higher completion rates, the ability to clarify questions, the ability to ask for additional information, and the ability to capture non-verbal information. Of course, there are also disadvantages including the time necessary to conduct individual interviews, and the possibility that fathers may be less candid in such a personal setting.

In a messy real-world setting like the FIP, the key to maximizing the strength of the inferences is probably a triangulation approach. If there is consistency about the impact of the program across multiple data sources (e.g., fathers, mothers, FIP staff, other agency staff), then one is more confident making a causal claim. Therefore, the triangulation approach was embraced for the summative evaluation. Also, given the importance of creating a defensible process for conducting a summative evaluation of such a complicated program, it was decided that Year 1 of the evaluation would be dedicated to piloting this component of the evaluation, with Years 2 and 3 devoted to collecting real baseline and post-participation data.

The next issue to be tackled was the particular topics to include in the impact assessment, followed by deciding on the actual questions to ask to cover these selected topics. In a meeting with program staff to address this issue, the following topic list was generated:

- Father's sense of confidence and competence in various situations
- Basic parenting skills
- Discipline techniques
- Amount of time interacting with child(ren)
- Rank of role of "father" among other life roles
- Relationship with other parent
- Beliefs in generational parenting (e.g., spanking)
- Understanding of child development
- Sense of connection or isolation

Based on this list, a literature search was conducted to review various self-report instruments that have been used in other evaluation and research studies. The instruments reviewed included the following:

- Father involvement instruments used by Iraj Poureslami in his research
- Strayhorn Parent Practices Scale
- MacPhee et al. Self-Perceptions of the Parental Role
- Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort Resident and Non-Resident Father Questionnaires
- Levine Group Evaluability Assessment of Responsible Fatherhood Programs

A draft version of the post-test FIP father interview was developed and presented to the program staff for their feedback. Based on this feedback, a working version was developed (see Appendix A), to be piloted with a small number of fathers. With the program staff's assistance in contacting fathers and setting up interview times (and driving some fathers to and from the interviews), seven fathers were interviewed during April 2008 - three fathers during a My Daddy and Me session, and four fathers in the afternoon before the Monday ball hockey game. These fathers ranged in age from under 20 to early 40s. One father had been

involved in the program for four years, while another had only participated for three weeks. Forty-five minutes were set aside for each interview. This period of time was established at the outset as the maximum desired, so not to overly tax the fathers being interviewed, and to maximize the total number of fathers that can be interviewed within the constraints of time and resources available for data collection.

All of the pilot test fathers were very accommodating and forthcoming. The semi-structured nature of the interview contributed to a conversational flow, with no evidence of any discomfort or sensitivity during the interviews. However, one father in this pilot group, a regular participant in the program, was absent for eight weeks after the interview. It is possible that this was caused in some way by the evaluation process, but the answer to that is unknown. Given the father-initiated nature of participation that is inherent in the FIP model, there is a natural reluctance to delve into reasons for non-participation.

One definite consequence of the conversational style of the interview was that in every case, some of the questions could not be asked within the 45 allotted minutes. A bit of this time pressure could be relieved by removing the demographic items; this information could be gathered at a separate time using a group questionnaire approach, and later appended to the information in the interview proper. Additional changes will certainly be necessary to make complete data collection more reliable. Four potential strategies are: 1) extending the maximum interview length to 60 minutes, 2) dropping less essential items, 3) asking each father the items that seem most pertinent to him, and 4) adopting a less conversational style to gather the information more efficiently. The choice of one or more of these strategies will take place in the early fall after consultation with the program staff.

The intention of the evaluation is to begin collecting baseline data from newly participating fathers, starting in the fall of 2008. The pretest (i.e., baseline) version of the father interview will be somewhat shorter, as the questions about experiences with the program (e.g., program strengths and weaknesses, accrued benefits) will not be applicable. Some consultation is still

necessary to decide which new fathers to include in the evaluation. It seems sensible that only fathers who start a group program or who begin individual support should qualify for inclusion.

It is the experience of the FIP staff that participation in the program can be fragile, particularly in the early stages. As such, exposing new participants to a baseline evaluation interview may have the unintended consequence of short-circuiting the participation of some fathers. Therefore, it is suggested that in the first year of baseline data collection, this potential disruption to program recruitment is tested. Rather than conducting the baseline interview with all new participants, they will be assigned at random to either have the interview or not. If in the first year, it turns out that there is a significant association between having a baseline interview and cutting short one's participation in the FIP, then the pretest-posttest evaluation design should be dropped, and a less-intrusive design put into place. It goes without saying that an evaluation process will not be useful (or valid) if it perturbs the system it is supposed to be objectively assessing.

Impact on children, families, community

As part of the triangulation approach to optimizing valid inferences, the perspectives of the mothers will be important to capture, for the posttest phase of impact assessment at least, and maybe for the pretest phase as well. There is no doubt that getting this information will be significantly less straightforward than it will be for the fathers in the program. Also, it will be ethically necessary to inform fathers about this before asking them for their consent to participate in the evaluation, with potential consequences for the rate of compliance. The mother interview will focus on two distinct impacts; first, her perspective on what the father's answers should have been in his interview (i.e., similarity of the two perspectives), and second, the perceived impact of the father's participation on her and the children. This interview schedule, particularly the latter aspect of the impact assessment, has yet to be finalized. A version will be pretested and revised in the fall of 2008, with real data collection

to start after revisions are complete. Discussions about the best strategies for collecting this information will take place early in the fall.

The detailed evaluation plan for impact on community will be deferred until the spring of 2009, with implementation expected in Year 3 of the evaluation.

Component 3: Indo-Canadian father involvement programming

The report on the formative aspects of evaluating this potential new component of FIP can be found under separate cover.

Component 4: New programming

Better access to family justice

Providing information to fathers (and mothers as well, to be fair) to help them with their family justice-related issues was identified as one of the top priority areas for new FIP programming. The first Family Justice seminar was held in November, 2007. Twenty-five attendees rotated through tables headed by five family justice system professionals (e.g., judge, lawyer, Family Maintenance Enforcement Program) to ask their questions and get advice. Feedback from the participants confirmed the helpfulness of this opportunity to learn about the system.

As a result of the success of the first Family Justice seminar, the Law Foundation of BC has been approached and has provided a grant to fund quarterly seminars, with funding included to provide individual follow-up support for fathers around their family justice issues. The second seminar was held on June 3, 2008, with 31 participants. Again, feedback was positive – all of the participants reported getting at least some of the information they were hoping to get, and 87% reported that the session met or exceeded their expectations. It is interesting that the proportion of male participants dropped from 68% for the first session to 35% in the second session. Also, few of the current FIP participants attended this session.

In both sessions, an opportunity was taken to talk about the FIP and its many components, with the hope of recruiting new fathers for the program. So far, there have not been any FIP participants whose entry into the program came from attending a Family Justice Seminar.

In the workplan, two evaluation questions were included to assess the impact of attending a Family Justice seminar: the number of fathers who go on to make new connections with the system based on the information they learned at the seminar, and the impact of these new connections on their family justice issues. This will be difficult to track, as the feedback forms do not ask for the name or contact information of attendees. However, this information can be captured from the fathers already participating in the FIP, or who join the FIP as a result of attending the Family Justice seminar, as a part of the impact assessment.

More involvement for fathers with children aged 6 to 10

The impetus for this additional programming came from those fathers who attend My Daddy and Me on Saturdays. This is the one regular program where fathers and their children attend together, and tends to serve the most vulnerable fathers, such as those with limited custody of their children. Once their children reach school age, they tend to self-select out of My Daddy and Me, given its focus on fathers with younger children. Therefore, there is a need for additional appropriate programming for these fathers and children.

Discussions were held in the past year with representatives of Abbotsford Parks and Recreation, with the idea that mutually beneficial programming could be arranged. Parks and Recreation would supply the venue and existing programming, and in return would get some staff support from FIP as well as attracting these normally hard-to-reach fathers to their programming. For the FIP, this would provide needed programming for these vulnerable fathers; it would also be a way to meet the goal of raising community awareness about fathering. These discussions were fruitful, and this new programming will begin in early

October, 2008, on Tuesday evenings. In the next year, evaluation efforts will be on tracking participation and satisfaction with the new programming.

More involvement for single and part-time fathers

Rather than designing more programming to meet this goal, it was decided that a better approach would be one of improving outreach to this group through promotional activities. A new brochure has been developed, and 500 have been distributed to agencies and displayed on community bulletin boards. While brochures have good potential for widespread visibility, they are limited because they cannot be easily updated to reflect new programming or upcoming special events. A web-based approach to program promotion has the advantage of easy updating, but may be less accessible, particularly to these vulnerable single and part-time fathers.

Many of these fathers have a connection to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), and so promotional activities need to take advantage of this connection. Also, there is no formal dialogue currently between FIP and MCFD social workers. This could happen in the future through activities such as workshops, conferences, and individual meetings, with the goal of attracting more of these fathers to participate in FIP.

In terms of evaluation, interviews with FIP staff and potentially MCFD staff are planned to assess how well these promotional activities are working.

Abbydads.ca website

The abbydads.ca website provides information about the FIP, its program components, and upcoming special events. Website hits are tracked, but statistics have not been reported. As of the present, no evaluation has been conducted for this component of the project. In the next year, a web survey will be developed and implemented, so information can be gathered about satisfaction with the website, how often people use it, who uses it, what parts of the website they use, and suggestions for improvement.

Component 5: Program sustainability

This component will be evaluated during Year 2 (2008/2009) of the evaluation.

Component 6: Dissemination of evaluation findings

The first opportunity to bring the findings of the evaluation to a larger audience will be October, 2008 for the FIRA conference in Toronto. Both evaluators, as well as the Program Coordinator and the senior Father Support and Resource Worker will be there to take part in two roundtable discussions. The main focus of the material presented will be on the “tricks of the trade” used by the FIP staff in their daily work with fathers. However, the discussion portion of the session will certainly allow some of the early evaluation insights to be disseminated.

Next Steps (Evaluation Year 2)

The next steps for the Indo-Canadian father programming component can be found in a separate report dedicated to that component.

1. Conduct a gap analysis of FIP documentation.
2. Collect data and analyze reasons for staying in the program and for ending participation in the program, to see if these are related to needs and goals.
3. Review the current FIP logic model with program staff.
4. Review the results of father interview pilot, to decide on final version and strategy for the impact assessment.
5. Test the effect of conducting a pretest father interview on later participation.
6. Collect and analyze pretest and posttest father interview data for the impact assessment.
7. Discuss best ways to collect partner data.
8. Develop, test, and finalize an interview schedule for the partners of FIP participants.
9. Collect and analyze partner data.
10. Create evaluation plan for assessing impact of the program on the community.
11. Collect and analyze data from fathers who attended a Family Justice seminar on any new connections made with the system, and impacts of these new connections.
12. Track participation and satisfaction with new Tuesday night programming for fathers with children aged 6 to 10.
13. Interview FIP staff and MCFD social workers about the success of creating more awareness of the program for single and part-time fathers.
14. Develop, pretest, and implement a web survey to assess the effectiveness of the abbydads.ca website.

Appendix F

New Beginnings Father Involvement Program
Discussion Paper –Indo-Canadian Program Component

By Barry Forer and Iraj Poureslami

July 2008

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A. Introduction

The Father Involvement Program is one component of the New Beginnings program offered by Abbotsford Community Services. Since its establishment in 1997 with a relatively modest mandate to support the fathers of pregnant or parenting female adolescents attending the New Beginnings high school classroom, the Father Involvement Program has become increasingly autonomous, with a steady expansion in terms of services offered and the range of fathers involved. While the program is still focused on fathers of children not yet in school (though this is changing), there is no restriction on the age of fathers that can participate. Currently, the program offers individual support, Nobody's Perfect parenting skills sessions, fathers-only recreation (weekly ball hockey and softball, a summer canoe trip), anger awareness workshops, a weekly breakfast playgroup for fathers and their young children, male co-facilitation of Best for Babies (a high-risk pregnancy program), occasional Family Justice seminars, and an annual Father's Day event.

Abbotsford Community Services successfully applied to the Vancouver Foundation to fund a three-year project with four goals:

9. Increased connections between fathers and their children aged 0 to 10 years, with particular emphasis on single fathers, part-time fathers, and South Asian-identified fathers.
10. Increased connections between fathers to reduce father isolation.
11. Increased community inclusiveness of fathers.
12. To conduct an external evaluation of the Father Involvement Program, with the results disseminated to interested BC communities.

In the funding proposal, the fourth goal (the external evaluation) listed three objectives:

7. To develop a steering committee to guide the evaluation process, with membership to include representatives of the ACS Early Childhood and Family Resource department, the coordinator of New Beginnings, FIN-BC, the BC Council for the Family, and the two external evaluators for the project (Barry Forer and Iraj Poureslami).
8. To develop a formative and summative evaluation plan based on the current logic model and the Father Involvement Program plan.
9. To document the evaluation findings in an accessible manner for other groups interested in fathering programs. To disseminate the findings through five provincial and/or pan-Canadian conference presentations.

B. Evaluation Workplan and Timetable

With the guidance of the steering committee, a three-year evaluation workplan and timetable was developed and approved. The evaluation workplan is divided into six components, each with several subcomponents. Each is briefly described below, with special emphasis on the component relating to greater participation of Indo-Canadian fathers.

The first component is a formative evaluation of program processes, and focuses on documentation processes, program components and linkages between them, the recruitment and retention of fathers, and human resource issues. The second component is a summative evaluation of the impacts of the Father Involvement program, particularly on the fathers themselves, but also potentially on their children and families, and on the community. The evaluation of impacts on fathers is based on assessing fathers before and after participation in the program, with careful consideration of other factors that could weaken the attribution of changes to the effect of the program. Impact on fathers is being considered quite broadly, encompassing aspects such as reaching (or progressing towards) agreed-upon goals with regards to such things as: involvement with children, involvement with mothers, reduced

isolation, reduced risk factors, and increased feelings of self-efficacy. Since fathers participate in the program with differing intensity and patterns of involvement, impact assessment will have to take this wide diversity into account as much as possible.

The third component of the evaluation involves a feasibility study for the development of increased participation of Indo-Canadian fathers in the program, followed by a process evaluation of the development of the program (should it be assessed as feasible), with the possibility (though unlikely) of the beginnings of a summative assessment of the implemented program by the end of the third year of the evaluation. The result of the feasibility assessment is the main topic for this report.

The fourth component is an evaluation of the new aspects of programming that were described in the project goals, as well as those already in the planning or early implementation stages at the start of the project. Four programming aspects are included in this evaluation: the Family Justice seminars, involvement of fathers with children from age 6 to 10, involvement of single and part-time fathers, and the abbydads.ca website.

The fifth evaluation component is a study of how to optimize program sustainability, through an assessment of funding structures, community networking, administration practices, and general community perceptions about the importance of father involvement. The final component focuses on the dissemination of the evaluation findings, and is concerned with determining the most effective methods to facilitate wide-ranging discussion, both geographically and philosophically.

C. Detailed Questions for the Indo-Canadian Programming Component

In the workplan, the following general evaluation questions were identified. These provided the starting point for the data collection and literature review, and to guide the development of follow up questions.

1. What is the size of the target population and where in Abbotsford do they live?
2. What has been done in the past regarding Indo-Canadian father involvement? What was learned from that experience?
3. What other community programs exist that serve this target group?
4. What other methods may be helpful in locating potential participants?
5. What community-based programs have been tried elsewhere (for fathers from various ethnocultural groups)? What components and/or resources are associated with success?
6. What are the opportunity costs and funding implications of developing an Indo-Canadian programming component?
7. What South Asian-specific community resources may potentially be partners (or just helpful) in program development and implementation?

D. Data Collection

Information for this report was gathered from three general sources: the 2001 and 2006 Canadian Census data (with results broken down by HELP-defined neighbourhoods), existing documents (mostly web-based, such as sites for various social services that serve the Indo-Canadian population), and key informant interviews (mostly individual, but some in small groups) with staff from a variety of health and social service programs that provide services to Indo-Canadian families.

E. Results and Discussion

1. Demographics of the Indo-Canadian Population in Abbotsford

Understanding the demographic picture of Indo-Canadian families in Abbotsford is an important first step in this assessment. The purpose is not to establish whether or not there are sufficient Indo-Canadian fathers in Abbotsford to justify some efforts to be more inclusive of them in the fathering program. Instead, the purpose is to help in the planning, development, and implementation process by establishing where to advertise community mobilization

meetings, where to find and recruit prospective participants, where to advertise the program, and even which locations would work best as venues for programming. It is also important to examine trends over time, both for the Abbotsford population as a whole and for the Indo-Canadian population specifically, and to examine which neighbourhoods are changing and which are relatively stable. The 2001 and 2006 Census data provide the best demographic information available for these purposes.

There are several Census variables that can be used to estimate the number of Indo-Canadian people living in Abbotsford, such as South Asian visible minority status, East Indian ethnic origin, Punjabi home language, and membership in the Sikh religion. For the purposes of this evaluation, South Asian minority status was chosen to represent the number (and percent) of Indo-Canadians in Abbotsford. This variable has the advantage of being asked every Census (unlike religion), and allows relatively straightforward comparisons with other visible minority populations, such as Chinese, Korean, Southeast Asian, and Latin American. These comparisons are an important part of the evaluation process, as one important question to answer is whether it makes sense to focus exclusively on Indo-Canadian fathers, rather than being more inclusive of other ethnocultural groups in Abbotsford with substantial or growing populations.

The South Asian visible minority population in Abbotsford increased by 37.4% between 2001 and 2006 (from 17,000 to 23,355 people), much higher than the 7.4% increase for Abbotsford as a whole. This raised the South Asian representation from 15% of the overall population to 19% over these five years. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the 2006 South Asian population by 17 Abbotsford neighbourhoods. (A map of Abbotsford showing these neighbourhoods can be seen at

http://www.help.ubc.ca/pubMaps/BC/SchoolDistrict/sd34_Abbotsford/EDI/sd34_Abbotsford_EDI.pdf.) There are seven neighbourhoods where the South Asian population is 1,000 or higher, and six neighbourhoods where the South Asian population represents at least 20% of the overall neighbourhood population. In 2006, about half of all South Asian people in Abbotsford lived

in just three neighbourhoods (Townline East, Townline West, and North Clearbrook), in an area roughly bounded by Mt. Lehman Road on the west, Downes Road on the north, Fraser Highway on the south, and Highway 11 on the east.

Table 1. 2006 South Asian Visible Minority Population, by Abbotsford Neighbourhood

<i>Neighbourhood</i>	<i>2006 South Asian population</i>	<i>% of population in neighbourhood</i>
Townline East	5,470	64.8
Townline West	3,890	49.2
North Clearbrook	4,670	43.3
South Poplar	1,615	28.5
Airport - Aberdeen	930	21.3
South Clearbrook	1,665	20.3
West Clearbrook	1,010	16.8
Clearbrook	1,230	13.3
Matsqui - Mt. Lehman	700	11.5
Mill Lake	830	8.6
Sumas Prairie	230	7.7
Kilgaard	240	4.5
McMillan	345	4.5
Abbotsford	165	3.6
Sandy Hill	170	1.6
Clayburn	150	1.4
Babich	45	0.9

With regards to the areas of most rapid increase in the Indo-Canadian population, there were five neighbourhoods (Townline East, Townline West, Clearbrook, North Clearbrook, and Airport-Aberdeen) where the proportion of South Asian residents increased by at least seven percentage points from 2001 to 2006. Table 2 shows the change over time for all Abbotsford neighbourhoods.

Table 2. Change from 2001 to 2006 in the Percentage of South Asian Population

<i>Neighbourhood</i>	<i>% South Asian in 2001</i>	<i>% South Asian in 2006</i>	<i>Absolute change (2001 to 2006)</i>
Townline East	52.3	64.8	12.5
Townline West	41.3	49.2	7.9
Clearbrook	5.5	13.3	7.8
North Clearbrook	35.5	43.3	7.8
Airport - Aberdeen	14.2	21.3	7.1
South Poplar	23.2	28.5	5.4
Matsqui - Mt. Lehman	6.4	11.5	5.1
West Clearbrook	11.8	16.8	5.1
Abbotsford	1.7	3.6	1.9
Kilgaard	2.8	4.5	1.7
Mill Lake	7.1	8.6	1.5
McMillan	3.2	4.5	1.3
Babich	0.6	0.9	0.3
Clayburn	1.2	1.4	0.2
Sumas Prairie	7.7	7.7	0.1
Sandy Hill	2.3	1.6	-0.7
South Clearbrook	22.0	20.3	-1.7

Other visible minority populations in Abbotsford are much smaller in size, by a factor of 10 or more. Next to the South Asian population, the next largest visible minority populations in 2006 were: Chinese (N=2,070), Southeast Asian (N=1,525), Korean (N=1,380), and Latin American (N=1,080). However, as was the case for the South Asian population, the rate of increase from 2001 to 2006 was much higher for these groups than for the general population. The Korean population increased most (by 93%), followed by the Chinese (51%), Southeast Asians (48%), and Latin Americans (40%). Indeed, all visible minorities taken together have increased their collective proportion of the Abbotsford population from 20% in 2001 to 26% in 2006. However, despite these increases, there was only one neighbourhood in 2006 where a non-South Asian visible minority represented 5% or more of the population – 5.6% of the Babich neighbourhood was Korean (up from 0.5% in 2001).

Overall, these Census figures seem to suggest that, while Abbotsford is becoming increasingly populated by people from various visible minorities, only the South Asian community has a population large enough to merit particular attention with regards to *specific* inclusion in the New Beginnings father involvement program. As will be discussed below, this does not preclude the merit of developing a programming model that is generally culturally inclusive.

2. Past Indo-Canadian Participation in the Father Involvement Program

Indo-Canadian fathers have been involved in two aspects of the Father Involvement program: the Saturday morning father-and-child breakfast, and the annual Father's Day event in the park.

There was a period of several weeks in 2006 when a small number of Indo-Canadian fathers and their children attended the "My Daddy and Me" breakfast playgroup. Their attendance was initiated through connections with an Indo-Canadian volunteer. When the volunteer was no longer able to attend the playgroup, the Indo-Canadian fathers' participation ended soon thereafter. During their participation, an effort was made to be more culturally inclusive by offering traditional South Asian foods, in addition to the usual fare of bacon, eggs, and pancakes. There was apparently little interaction between the Indo-Canadian fathers and the other fathers, with the former group tending to converse in their home language (Punjabi) with each other.

This experience with "My Daddy and Me" provided several clues about involving Indo-Canadian fathers in the program. First, both recruitment and ongoing participation are assisted by having someone from that culture creating and maintaining a comfortable and culturally relevant atmosphere in the program for fathers; indeed, it is likely necessary to have such a person from the community for this to succeed. Second, while it is certainly helpful, making cultural accommodations such as being sensitive to food preferences is not sufficient to ensure ongoing participation. Any successful program must understand and address, in a deep sense, the needs, priorities, and challenges faced by potential Indo-Canadian participants.

The annual Father's Day event at Mill Lake Park, called Celebrating Dads, is consistently an occasion when many Indo-Canadian fathers interact, through the fun activities of the event, with representatives (both staff and active participants) from the Father Involvement program. In June 2008, there were almost 1,000 people taking part in the event, including many Indo-Canadian families. While this may appear to be an excellent opportunity to create awareness about the program and potentially recruit fathers (Indo-Canadian or otherwise), the focus of the day is primarily on community awareness and respect. Other than the advertising for the event, some brochures at the main booth, and marketing items (Frisbees, t-shirts) to promote the abbydads.ca website, the day is not about promoting the program or recruiting fathers, but having a community celebration of fatherhood. Therefore, this event has not yet provided an opportunity to learn anything specific about how to attract Indo-Canadian fathers to the program. It does show, not surprisingly, that the idea of celebrating fathers has cross-cultural relevance.

3. Potential Program Pathways

There are essentially four distinct pathways that could be followed. The first pathway would be to create a *separate Father Involvement program* exclusively for Indo-Canadian fathers. The second pathway would be to *modify the program to be more generally attractive to fathers from all ethnocultural groups*, not just Indo-Canadian fathers. The third pathway would be to *attract Indo-Canadian fathers to the current program*, after making whatever modifications (e.g., philosophy, programming, marketing) necessary to make successful integration possible. Each of these pathways has been suggested by one or more of those key informants interviewed for this evaluation report, and so will be examined in turn. The final option is to stay put and not follow any of the other three pathways. This is a real option, given the costs (monetary and opportunity costs) of bringing in major new programming, as well as the potential disruptions to the staff and fathers currently involved with the program.

The first three approaches share several challenges, such as creating culturally relevant programming, hiring new staff, finding potential participants, and making sure that the Father

Involvement program as a whole hangs together in some coherent way as it grows and changes.

3a. Separate Indo-Canadian Program

The main advantage of having a separate program is cultural and linguistic homogeneity, and the high level of familiarity and comfort that comes from participating in a program with people very much like oneself. Program design would be relatively straightforward, meeting one cultural group's needs. It would also have the advantage of leaving the already-successful majority culture Father Involvement program intact. If cross-cultural program integration was desired down the road, it would not be attempted until the homogeneous group was well-established, which would typically take some years to accomplish.

There are a number of disadvantages to having a completely separate program. The primary disadvantage is cost, as it would require a duplication of staff, space, equipment, etc. Second, cost efficiency is an issue, since these costs would have to be borne during the expected long-term establishment period. Third, since this approach is so culturally specific, other ethnocultural groups could not benefit unless and until they could have their "own" program.

3b. Including Fathers From All Ethnocultural Groups

This option is not entirely consistent with the Vancouver Foundation proposal, which specified Indo-Canadian fathers as a target group for program inclusion, or with the approved evaluation workplan, which is similarly culturally specific. Nevertheless, this option was supported early in the project by some members of the steering committee. There are at least two advantages of this model. First, it is a model based on maximizing equitable access of all fathers to the Father Involvement program. Second, a model that emphasizes inclusion regardless of ethnocultural composition has the greatest likelihood of being directly transferable to other communities interested in developing or improving their own father involvement programs. Given that transferability of knowledge is an objective of the project, this option has merit, and may be worth exploring. However, it is less clear what the necessary

“ingredients” are for a program that would meet the needs of all fathers regardless of ethnocultural makeup, and there was no opportunity within the limitations of the evaluation to explore this option.

3c. Modifying Current Program to Include Indo-Canadian Fathers

In some ways this option is the most straightforward, given its focus on being inclusive of only one ethnocultural group and accomplishing this inclusion within the current program, rather than creating a whole new program. The particular disadvantages of this model are potential short-term disruption to those participating in the existing program, and issues of equity for other ethnocultural groups not receiving “special treatment.” This is the main option that will be further explored in this paper.

4. Which Generation(s) of Indo-Canadian Fathers to Target?

There are at least three distinct subgroups of Indo-Canadian fathers with young children: new immigrants, those born outside of Canada but who have lived here for some years, and those born in Canada (i.e., second or third generation Indo-Canadians). Providing programs and services that are appropriate to all subgroups is very challenging. Some programs, such as the Assaultive Men Group at Abbotsford Community Services, have to tailor their services to the needs of all subgroups because they have no control over who is referred to the program. Other programs, such as (the currently inactive) Village of Men, deliberately tried to target all subgroups of Indo-Canadian men through their media campaign, based on Abbotsford Community Services’ mandate of inclusivity and diversity. For the Father Involvement Program, there is the opportunity to make a strategic decision about targeting specific subgroups of Indo-Canadian fathers, if that would be beneficial in the planning, development, and implementation of this new component of the program.

It is suggested by key informants that for planning the Indo-Canadian component of the Father Involvement program, second and third generation Indo-Canadian fathers should be targeted. These more Westernized fathers are more adapted to the Canadian system, and thus

would show more interest in participating in the fathering program. According to those interviewed for the evaluation, this subgroup has more positive attitudes about fathering, more engagement with their children (and particularly with daughters), and are more open to participating in community services. In contrast, first generation Indo-Canadian fathers of newcomers are more likely to follow traditional styles of parenting, and would be less likely to show interest, participate and benefit from the Father Involvement program. However, one possible route to their eventual participation would be through individual connections with more Westernized family members and friends who have already been involved with the program.

5. Community Champions and Facilitators

Key informants were unanimous that the successful planning, development, and implementation of Indo-Canadian father involvement programming requires ongoing and meaningful leadership from male members of the Indo-Canadian community. Qualified leaders would be needed for several roles, including: mobilizing the community, marketing the program, planning the program components, recruiting fathers for the program, and working with fathers in the program once implemented. It is possible that one person could fulfil all of these roles, though that is not necessary.

The ideal starting point in the process is the identification and hiring of an Indo-Canadian person (preferably a father) to be the “Indo-Canadian father involvement community champion.” The primary role of this champion is community mobilization around the issue of father involvement in the Abbotsford Indo-Canadian community. This would entail activities such as: making presentations to service providers and influential individuals in the community; gathering people together to establish community priorities around an Indo-Canadian component of the father involvement program; creating, translating and disseminating information (e.g., brochures, flyers) in places where families gather and at community events; identifying potential participants for a fathering program; and educating

these potential participants about the benefits of joining a father involvement program (e.g., better understanding and communication with their children).

It is very important for this community mobilization work to be done in advance of actual programming. Otherwise, the program risks engaging only superficially in the culture-specific needs of Indo-Canadian fathers. Proactive and deep engagement in issues of cultural relevance will make it much more likely for a program to be sustainable beyond its start-up phase.

To be suitable for this job, a prospective champion would need a wide range of qualifications, including: bilingual English/Punjabi, well-educated, some experience working with the community (community-oriented person), open-minded, and both trusted and somewhat well-known in the community. Sue Khazaie, in her past role as Implementation Manager for the Make Children First project in the Eastern Fraser Valley (which employs a Community Champion model) should be consulted about other qualities that she has found to be most associated with effective community champions.

The qualifications necessary to facilitate (i.e., plan, develop, and implement) a program suitable for Indo-Canadian fathers are different than those for a community champion. In addition to being bilingual English/Punjabi and a trusted member of the local (or maybe regional) Indo-Canadian community, a successful candidate would require some background in the social services, both in terms of education and previous work experience. Three keys to success were mentioned by those interviewed: cultural relevance, trust, and experience. Experience is particularly important for programs that involve both first- and second-generation participants (such as the Assaultive Men's Group); if it is decided to focus the Indo-Canadian fathering program on more Westernized fathers, the task is simpler and probably requires less expertise to meet the needs of everyone. However, a facilitator would need to know what to emphasize culturally, and how to engage deeply with the needs of the individuals in the program. Trust, of course, is a key ingredient for all successful fathering programs, but it is still important to emphasize for Indo-Canadian fathers in particular, whose

enthusiasm for participation may be easily undermined by traditional sensitivities relating to pride or ego.

Locating a community champion and/or facilitator may be a challenging process. In the Village of Men (VOM) project, the project lead was well-known, having a lot of previous experience in social services in Abbotsford and Surrey. The eight VOM facilitator/counsellors were recruited through a combination of advertisements and word of mouth. It was suggested that potential candidates to act as community champions or facilitators could be identified by approaching prominent Indo-Canadian community members such as Moe Gill (the city counsellor), Sat Gill (the school trustee) or Rick Gill (president of the Fraser Valley Indo-Canadian Business Association), or by consulting with staff at programs that work with Indo-Canadian clients, such as Public Health, Abbotsford School District, UFV Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies, Women's Resource Society, Family Outreach, the Addiction Centre, the Assaultive Men's Program, Victim Services, and Best for Babies.

6. Locating Potential Participants / Key Contacts

The key informants collectively suggested a number of strategies for locating Indo-Canadian fathers that would benefit from a father involvement program. Not surprisingly, staff at the same health, education, and social service programs for Indo-Canadian clients mentioned above would be just as helpful for identifying potential participants as for finding community champions and facilitators. Part of the job description of the community champion would also be to identify potential participants, not only by meeting with service providers and influential community leaders, but also by taking advantage of being well-known and trusted in the community to do some word-of-mouth promotion of the father program. This informal approach takes full advantage of the connections that the community champion can make with like-minded people who are supportive of the program.

The two Sikh temples in Abbotsford have been suggested as a particularly important place to connect with the Indo-Canadian community. The executive committees of the temples would

likely be open to providing assistance to a father involvement program, particularly if that assistance could be described concretely. Assistance could take a number of forms, from displaying flyers about the program at the temple, to providing space for mobilization-related meetings, to allowing presentations about the program to the congregation.

Another key to success, both in terms of mobilization and building a core of participants, is to realize that these goals are accomplished in small steps, and it is unrealistic to have anything like an established Indo-Canadian father involvement program until more than a year after launching the community mobilization phase of the project. It takes time to meet with all of the necessary groups, establish a program model that meets the needs, priorities, and challenges faced by the community, promote the program, and build a stable core of participants.

In terms of promoting the program and the benefits of father involvement, key informants suggested that audiovisual media are preferable to print media, and promotional materials should be in both English and Punjabi. For example, television and radio (as was used by the Village of Men project) are effective, though relatively costly, means to get the message to the community. For instance, Village of Men created public service announcements that were shown on Channel M to advertise their family violence and education program. Ethnic radio call-in shows could also be tapped, by inviting the community champion, facilitator, and/or influential community members to discuss father involvement and describe the Indo-Canadian fathering program to the community. In terms of print media, there is *Punjabi Patrika*, the only Abbotsford bilingual newspaper to promote education and health.

Other important, and relatively inexpensive, promotional aids would be bilingual materials like brochures, flyers, and pamphlets. Some literature in Punjabi about parenting and early childhood development already exists, but it is geared towards mothers. The Indo-Canadian community champion and/or facilitator could work with others in the community who have created the existing materials to adapt them for the fathering context.

7. Programming in an Indo-Canadian Father Involvement Program

The success of an Indo-Canadian father involvement program (or component of the overall program) will be dependent on the extent to which it is perceived as culturally relevant, accessible, and safe. It can be predicted with virtual certainty some essential components will include: an Indo-Canadian program facilitator, the incorporation of traditional South Asian foods in activities involving food, creating a physical environment that is sensitive to Indo-Canadian beliefs and practices, using stories and images that are relevant to the culture, celebrating cultural events and holidays, and scheduling activities at times when fathers are most available to participate.

Of course, there are other communities where Indo-Canadian fathering programs have been attempted, or at least programming for ethnoculturally diverse fathers. Their experiences and lessons learned will provide guidance for all aspects of developing a program in Abbotsford. The community champion and/or facilitator, as part of their mobilization/planning activities, should consult with organizations such as:

- Surrey Delta Immigration Services (now called DiverCity). They have different radio shows on the Punjabi radio station focusing on Indo-Canadian fathers in terms of family issues (e.g., violence) as well as traditional issues relating to parenting and father involvement. (www.dcrs.ca/index.php)
- Calgary Father Involvement Network (see below)
- The fathering program in Richmond Hill, Ontario that improved their ethnocultural diversity by translating their program information into the most common non-English languages.

Other important resources would be FIN-BC (Father Involvement Network, BC) which is housed at the BC Council for Families in Vancouver, and FIRA, the national Father Involvement Research Alliance (www.fira.ca), which is a clearinghouse for information and resources for individuals and organizations working with fathers. One of the research clusters at FIRA is research on immigrant fathers; this cluster is led by Dr. David Este at the

University of Calgary. A recent example from his research team of practical approaches to recruit fathers from cultural communities can be found at:

http://fira.ca/cms/documents/45/Immigrant_Fathers.pdf.

Other essential components that are perhaps more specific to the Abbotsford context would be established through the mobilization and planning processes. One useful (and perhaps obvious) suggestion is to make sure to involve fathers from the Indo-Canadian community in the planning and design of the program. And of course, there are a number of challenges that need to be acknowledged within the framework of exploring options for this program.

8. Challenge – Funding, Staffing, and Opportunity Costs

Funding an Indo-Canadian component of the father involvement program is a major challenge. There is currently only about \$5,000 available that could be applied for this purpose. At best, this would only sustain a part-time community champion for a few months' worth of mobilization activities. Much more time and money would need to be raised to complete the consultation and education process of the community champion, and to plan and deliver something that is culturally relevant – for a long enough period of time to give the program a chance to be sustainable. One-time start-up funding (as experienced recently by the Village of Men project) is too often a recipe for raising and then dashing expectations. It is somewhat different in this case, as the mobilization task can emphasize the exploratory elements of gathering information about needs and challenges, and can be couched in terms of what programming might be developed if further funding was secured.

Unfortunately, the current father involvement program operates on a very tight budget, and so it is not likely that any of their funding could be diverted to assist in the creation of this new component. However, given the recommendation (in this report) against the establishment of a completely separate Indo-Canadian father involvement program, it would still be necessary for the staff of the current fathering program to work closely and coordinate with the facilitator of the Indo-Canadian component throughout the planning, development and

implementation phases of the new component. This coordination would have its own costs, of course, both in terms of further stretching the responsibilities of the current staff and the opportunity costs of implementing other desired additions or enhancements to the current program.

9. Challenge – Melding Programs

In addition to these funding and staffing challenges, there are still important practical and philosophical issues relating to adding an Indo-Canadian component to the existing program. Of course, these will be dependent to a great extent on the results of the community mobilization and consultation about the type of program and activities that would meet the needs of Indo-Canadian fathers and their families. Essentially, the question is: what are the short-term and long-term risks to the current program by adding a culturally relevant Indo-Canadian component?

Besides the increased risk of staff burnout, there is the potential for disrupting the integrity of the current program. Much of the success of the current program is built on the availability and willingness of staff to support fathers (both individually and in group activities) when they need support. Melding two groups who may differ on preferred activities, preferred meeting times, and even preferred types of support has a lot of potential to expose any fragility in current father/staff relationships and affect patterns of attendance. Some of the goals of the program may not resonate as much for Indo-Canadian fathers. For example, a major focus of the current program is to help (some) participants deal with issues of social isolation and also to help them grapple with what it means to be a father. Other aspects of the program seem to be more in line with the anticipated needs of Indo-Canadian fathers. According to a key informant, an appropriate focus for them would be on improving parenting skills, and dealing with anger issues. There are elements of both of these already in the program, through Best for Babies and Nobody's Perfect (parenting skills), and the Anger Awareness workshop. These program aspects would have to be delivered in a culturally relevant way, however.

F. Summary and Recommended Next Steps

There are several compelling reasons why it is important for Abbotsford Community Services to address the absence of Indo-Canadian fathers in their father involvement program. First, about one in five Abbotsford residents is from this ethnocultural group, with rates of growth much higher than for the non-visible minority population. Second, the father involvement program already includes elements (e.g., anger awareness, parenting skills) that have been identified as issues for Indo-Canadian fathers. Third, the program would complement programs that Indo-Canadian fathers are already attending (e.g., Family Outreach, Assaultive Men's group) or are currently attended only by mothers (e.g., Best for Babies). Fourth, health and social service staff who work with Indo-Canadian families are supportive of a culturally relevant father involvement program. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we expect that it would be beneficial for the fathers and mothers, and especially for the children in this community.

The main challenges to developing and operating an Indo-Canadian component of the program are the usual suspects - money and time. Those interviewed for this report consistently emphasized the need to "do it right," which means taking the necessary time to mobilize and plan, and employing the right Indo-Canadian person to act as a community champion (and perhaps program facilitator). Time and effort would also be required of the current program staff - to find and hire a community champion, to make the necessary connections with the Indo-Canadian community, and to work collaboratively to plan an inclusive program that honours everyone's needs.

The first step should be to hold a meeting of the father involvement program staff (and the evaluators) to decide whether to proceed at all with starting a process to establish an Indo-Canadian component to the program. The key questions for this meeting are:

1. Given these compelling reasons and challenges, how committed are we to starting this process? How convinced are we that this is a high priority initiative for the program to undertake?
2. Do we have (or could we get) both the funding and the time to “do it right?” For example, without sufficient funding for a community champion, there would be difficult to proceed in a culturally meaningful way.

If the decision is made at that meeting to proceed with the hiring of a community champion, the second step would be to create a job description. The job tasks would depend on the amount of funding available for the community champion. If the amount (as expected) is quite modest, the tasks should be structured to focus on the elements of the community mobilization that provide the most information (e.g., setting priorities) while minimizing expectations that a program will be funded (e.g., not identifying potential participants).

The third step would be to canvass the various programs and organizations that work with the Indo-Canadian community, and the influential members of the community, to identify some candidates for the community mobilization job. Manpreet Grewal at ACS and Satwinder Bains at UFV would be two key people in this process. UFV in particular would be fertile ground for identifying candidates from the ranks of Indo-Canadian students in social service programs, especially if the position is part-time. It is also possible that the community mobilization process could work as an academic project for a Master’s student, which would make the process more affordable.

Should funding and other challenges allow, one result of the community mobilization process should be the identification and hiring of someone to facilitate the planning and development of the Indo-Canadian component. Assuming that the community champion does not begin work until sometime in the fall of 2008, it is not expected that this phase of the process would begin until at least the spring of 2009. At this point, the community mobilization process will have been evaluated (as part of the current Vancouver Foundation evaluation) and a formative

evaluation report will be written. This report will provide the blueprint for the facilitator and current staff to design and (if funding permits) begin to implement the program.