Chapter 5: The Changing Nature of Families

# Case Study

School X is in an area of social deprivation in Belfast. They work hard to maintain links with families and provide support for families to help their children with literacy and numeracy. However, they struggle to develop links with fathers. There is research to show that white working-class boys in Northern Ireland is one of the groups of children who are most at risk and are failing to achieve academically. There is also a body of evidence that fathers are significant in the lives of children, including their academic attainment. Therefore, with both of these factors in mind, the school wanted to reach out to fathers in a bid to encourage them to be interested in their children’s school lives. However, they felt that fathers would not respond positively to coming into school for an activity so they organised a day out for fathers and their sons. They took this as a starting point with a view to extending this to fathers and daughters in the future. The activity was advertised as a day out hill-walking in a local mountain range and the children took home information to their fathers and acted as the ‘hook’ to bring their fathers along. Particular effort was made to include fathers who were not resident with their children. The emphasis was on fathers but there was also a small number of grandfathers, uncles and older brothers, who acted as father figures in families who had no contact with fathers.

## Activity

1. Why do you think that it can be difficult to engage some fathers in being involved in school life?
2. What might be the particular challenges for this school in the case study?
3. Why do you think the school took the approach to have an activity away from school?
4. Do you think it is important to extend this activity to fathers and daughters? Why?
5. Consider what some appropriate follow up activities might be to continue the involvement of fathers for this school.
6. Open the 2014 Centre for Social Justice Report ‘Fully Committed? How a Government could reverse family breakdown’ at:

<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20reports/CSJJ2072_Family_Breakdown.pdf>

Read the executive summary of this report on pages 14–22 and consider the following points:

* Reflect on the bullet points on page 15. Are you shocked by these figures or are they what you expect in modern society in the UK? Discuss your thoughts with a peer.
* What implications do these figures have for people who will be working with children?
* What are the challenges associated with the change in culture that is set out in the five bullet points at the top of page 16?
* What is the reported impact on family breakdown on children (see page 17) and do you think the Government should be trying to bring about change in this area of family instability and why/why not?