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MEDIA RELEASE

Paid Paternity Leave Essential For Long-Term Child Wellbeing

The Families Commission today calls for four weeks paid parental leave for fathers in response to the results of their research titled 'Supporting Kiwi Dads'. Father & Child Trust wholeheartedly supports that call.

Paid Paternity Leave exists in several countries, including the UK, and is taken by a majority of new fathers where it is available. In countries where there is no separate entitlement of parental leave to fathers, uptake rates by dads are negligible.

Father & Child Trust has recently come across a father who assumed sole day-to-day care of his son only weeks after his birth, but as a male was not entitled to parental leave. This case is reported in today's 'The Press'.

This highlights the need that parental leave needs to be available specifically for fathers, even if they are not the current partners of the mother.

Research has shown that forming a bond between father and baby in the weeks and months after birth drastically increases the likelihood of the father's ongoing involvement throughout childhood. Medical studies have shown that, like women, men's hormones change as a result of a close relationship with their baby, giving them similar parenting 'instincts' and responsiveness as mothers. A responsive and involved father has been shown to lead to improved outcomes for children, such as higher academic achievement and better psycho-social adjustment.

Through complementing the existing 12 weeks maternity leave with 4 weeks paternity leave law-makers would acknowledge the partnership approach now commonly taken by parents to raise their children, as shown by the Families Commission's report. Where parents do not live together, paid paternity leave would increase the likelihood of ongoing involvement of the father.

Father & Child Trust also believes that paid paternity leave will greatly help with the support and recovery of mothers suffering from postnatal depression or other postnatal mental health problems, which affect 10-20% of new mothers.