

Building Blocks for Father Involvement: Planning for Success

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Darrell Gordon: Okay, now don't pull 'em, don't pull 'em too hard. That's good, fill it up. Wow, that tree's gonna do good, I think. I'm a widow, single father raising three children. I have to do things as the mother would do and also as the father, and...it's very challenging and...I almost have no time for myself. All the energy, the attention is on the children. Morning!

Robert Goslin: My heart went out to Darrell. When I first met Darrell, he had no car, he had no hot water heater working, he had no telephone. You know, his daughter had missed at least a couple weeks of school, we were concerned about him up on this end.

Darrell: Rob would come to my house and let's go you're gonna go let's go check this out. I'm there you know and it took me a little while to actually get the motivation and to be part of that.

Man 1: We're trying to bring the word to dads, we're bringing...

Darrell Gordon: Until I found out more about it, I related to some of the people that worked there.

Robert: I think his alcohol abuse did hurt him historically because prior to his wife getting in the car accident and dying, she- he was not in the home.

Darrell was not in the home at all, he was out of the home and he was out of the home because of his alcohol abuse. So, therefore, when he came back to his children, he had to assume that role and responsibility of this infant that he had not been around.

Darrell Gordon: Go. We've always been close and I feel that that is a strong tradition with Native Americans. My daughter started when she was four months old and I wasn't aware that the program really existed. They're learning, they're teaching the children native language and being a single parent, I guess that that was a positive thing for me and it helped me to heal. I think it's amazing what Rob is doing and I really can't say where I would be. I would be struggling, it would be so hard for me to raise my three children and he helped me a lot...to get back on my feet again.

Man 2: I think that if we were able to implement that on a yearly basis ...Narrator: Now that you have built a good solid foundation, in Part 4 you will focus on the lumber, bricks and drywall to shape and support your program or build an addition to an existing fatherhood program. It is here that we start planning. Successful fatherhood plans answer several key questions. What do you want to accomplish? What are the needs of the fathers in your community? What services will you provide? How will you recruit and retain fathers and how will you evaluate your effectiveness?

Windy Hill: We've looked at a lot of fatherhood programs across the country and have had an opportunity to evaluate those who seem to be achieving the greatest benefit for children and I think the one characteristic that's most important about that is the involvement of fathers in the planning.

Narrator: Unsuccessful programs typically have several red flags of failure in common, including failure to assess the needs of fathers, failure to adequately train staff, failure to gain the support of agency leadership, and failure to fully understand the impact an involved father can have in the life of a child.

Windy Hill: Head Start could be considered in terms of launching a new fatherhood initiative as much like a business in that like a company, you have customers, children and families, and in this case, you have a new target market, which are fathers. And much like a business, you have to study and evaluate the needs of this new target market.

Ivette Cintron: We actually had surveys even sent out to the fathers within our centers so that we could get their feedback and their input as far as what types of topics they felt were important.

Narrator: Since assessing needs is so important, take time to get good solid answers to the questions found in Building Block manual #4 such as, how many fathers are working? How many are married? How many have children with special needs or learning challenges? What do fathers enjoy doing with their children? What are their dreams? What kinds of cultures are represented and do you have staff that can relate to these fathers.

Savoui Graham: Because really if you have done a thorough assessment of your capacity to service fathers, then it becomes easier to see where you're going. Narrator: Once you have learned about the characteristics of the fathers in your community and you have figured out their needs, you are ready to set your goals. The goal-setting stage of building your fatherhood involvement program is critical.

Windy Hill: Head Start is a program that had evolved over many years and one of the unique characteristics of Head Start is that we're always on that cutting edge, we're always looking for ways to improve and strengthen what we do.

Narrator: Improving a father's parenting skills would be the kind of goal you are looking for, so would teaching a dad to say "I love you" more, or teaching him how to promote a love of learning in his child, so is teaching him how to strengthen his marriage.

With careful planning, you can design activities that will achieve your goals. Parenting groups can help fathers celebrate fatherhood and learn the beneficial role they play in their children's lives. Cultural events, barbeques, games and family fun night can help fathers bond with their children.

Man 3: Now when you come out underneath the condenser...

Narrator: Job development and advancement can help fathers break down a major barrier that often prevents them from spending time with their kids. One-on-one mentoring and father-to-father peer support can allow fathers to encourage and instruct each other on ways they can become effective, loving and involved fathers. Parenting groups designed just for fathers who don't live with their children can help them learn how to overcome resistance from the child's mom towards Dad's participation and improve communication with the child's mom. Two final bricks to help build your structure: remember to plan to get fathers involved and don't go it alone. Let's face it, most of your fathers will not typically think of your Head Start center as a place that is for them. Bringing them in will take time, but if you build it and plan it well, they will come. Drop-off, for example, is a good time to get to know fathers. Each time you see them, you can build on your relationship.

Getting lots of community partners to help you is your support. You don't want to go it alone. You can't be everything to all dads, but you can serve as a key connection-maker for fathers, linking them with services and resources they need. Now get your creative juices flowing and pick up the program planning worksheet in Building Block manual #4. Take your time with it, talk to a lot of dads. As you fill it out, think about how you will evaluate your success and build that into your plan. Plan to get regular feedback from fathers throughout your programs activities. Keep a log and brief notes about each father's participation.

You can download information that will help. You have completed an important phase of growth for your Head Start Program. You have planned the structure that will involve fathers in their children's lives.

Darrell Gordon: Swish it this time, ready? Narrator: And you will be giving these children an incredible Head Start in life.

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