

Building Blocks for Father Involvement: Building A Foundation To Work with Fathers

(links for viewing and download at end of transcript)

Richard Williams: N? what's that?Child: NRichard Williams: And it says Jonathan, my name's Jonathan too.

The qualities I try to model is just be yourself, be a person that anybody could look up to without doing anything bad, for somebody to look up to you. You understand what I'm saying like you ain't gotta be a gangster or a person making money the fast way, you know, you can be a person that's working hard and go to school.(To daughter): Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep! You got your license? You ain't had no license?

Me and my baby's mother had a little dispute, I left. Everything started like getting shaky: my son really wasn't focusing in school, my daughter she's a sickle cell patient and she kept getting sick all the time.(To daughter) That hurt? [Kisses her] All better, right? All right.

So then when I came back into their life, he's more he's trying to get more focused in school, he's learning how to read he's writing more and my daughter is she's barely getting sick as much.(To daughter) When he finished giving a trim, he'll want a broom to sweep up, he'll start sweeping.

It's a very difficult thing to do when you got people taking money out of your checks and then you got you got your girl or your wife sitting there taking your money and not really paying for the things she's really supposed to pay for. But sometimes you have to realize it's not all about you and it's not all about her -- it's about that kid.Fatherhood program trainer: When you don't do that then your child becomes very insecure about him or herself.

Richard Williams: I started going through it with the fatherhood program, you know I started seeing the kids more often and going through classes and realizing Head Start is very important to the neighborhood. You know without Head Start a lot of people wouldn't be able to work so I was like maybe I should go back and talk to Savoui and the people in the building and it was like oh you know first substitute and then we'll see how it is. I substituted and then I became a teacher's aide.

It's an adventure (laughter), it's, it's an adventure because you never know what the kid's going to do, you never know what the kid's going to say, and you never know what the kid's will bring out of you so it's, it's like an adventure.Savoui Graham: We believe in success stories and those success stories create other success stories.

Richard Williams: Need help? Okay this is what we're going to do. One line... You did it, all by yourself. I would love to see some of these kids grow, I mean some of the kids that sit there and might be a problem child now but might be the president in the next couple of years, you never know. I try to get the young fathers that come by or young fathers that I know and I see that they're struggling, I be like well look there's places out there that can help you or so.

I'm an example of the things that can happen if you go to the places and you figure out what's really out there for you.

Man 1: What sound does a sheep make?Narrator: In Building Block 3, you'll take a good look at how effective your program is in involving fathers and what changes you need to make to make it as father friendly as possible. You'll be working on the foundation that will help you develop your vision for your program whether you're just starting a fatherhood program or building on your current work.

Denota Watson: We had a father who came and was was elected by his center to be part of our policy council and he came to one of the meetings and he looked around the room and saw the females and he says "Well, where are the -- where are the dads?" And we said, "Yeah, well, where are the rest of the dads?" And he says, "Well, I'm going to make a commitment to help get more fathers involved."

Narrator: Our research has identified several characteristics of a successful fatherhood program.Computer trainer: I'd like everyone to double-click on the C drive.Narrator: Successful mature programs teach dads more than parenting

skills to help them develop as a person. Mature programs hire a father-involvement coordinator exclusively dedicated to father-involvement work...

Woman 1: If I can get volunteers, yeah it would be great. Narrator: ... or combined with a few smaller jobs. Successful mature programs provide training for the father-involvement coordinator and all father-involvement staff as well as teachers and family specialists.

Ivette Cintron: We had actually definitely had some issues with female staff expressing some of their concerns and really sharing hurtful experiences that they had had as children growing up.

And I think that as a program basically what we did was give them the opportunity to talk about those things and providing them with avenues to where they could go to help resolve some of those issues and, and letting them recognize, helping them to recognize actually, that not all males were detrimental to children's lives. Not all fathers inflicted harm and that there are males out there who are doing a wonderful job at raising their kids.

Narrator: Mature programs are doing a good job of involving both fathers who are living with their children and fathers who are not including holding special meetings for nonresident dads on subjects that interest them. Since 74 percent of all Head Start Programs have at least some children whose fathers are incarcerated, successful mature programs take strong steps to include these dads.

Successful programs are more likely to have good working relationships with community agencies like Child Support Enforcement and groups that can help fathers develop job skills and overcome substance abuse. Mature programs set up goals and recognize that achieving each goal brings their program one step closer to success. Next you'll want to give your program the survey found in the Building Block manual number 3. By taking a walk through your center and trying to look at it through the eyes and sensitivities of a man.

Easy if you are a male, harder if you are a female, but it can work if you can have a few trusted men take the survey with you. So far on this section we have taken a look at what makes a mature program successful and we've stopped to assess where you are at. Now it's time to build the base of your foundation and the first question that is always asked is, "Where am I going to get the money to pay for this?"

Denota Watson: On our overarching program budget, we have a line item, you know, for parent involvement activities and that's the line item that we use to and you know support or male-involvement initiative because our belief is that the fathers are parents in our program too, so, you know, we don't look at it that we need special monies just to get dads involved. It's part of the program.

Narrator: There are advantages to relying on the security and the consistency of your existing budget. But to provide a wider range of services, you may want to consider applying for government grants or teaming up with local businesses and organizations. A vital step is to hire a full-time fatherhood coordinator. This position is best filled by a man who will be a peer to the fathers you are seeking to work with and you may be able to hire a very involved and passionate father.

A female coordinator can successfully do it but only if men are actively involved. You will need to build staff commitment and you will need to start by gaining the support of your agency's leaders. The US Department of Education has a great presentation you can download to help you do this. And you will need to create a training plan for the staff that includes not only some half- or full-day training but a long term strategic training plan that reinforces the message through presentations and activities at staff meetings.

Inside Building Block manual #3, you'll find a tool that will help you figure out what your own staff's attitudes and experiences are so you can work to overcome those roadblocks.

Ivette Clinton: I think that the issue of male spouses being able to understand and supportive of the fact that their wives are out at different centers going into...going into homes, doing home visits where males may be, you know, the only one present. I think that that's been one of the things that culturally has been difficult to work through.

Narrator: Now you have studied what makes a program successful and you've taken a close look at your own program. You are ready to connect the two by thinking about what you are already doing and what needs to be done. Fill out the planning tool and action plan you will find in the Appendix of Building Block 3. Both will help steer your agency in the direction it needs to go.

Richard Williams: Where Barbie at? You going to go pick her up? Oh she at home, you going to go pick her up?

Narrator: You will have established a good firm foundation for including fathers in your children's lives and giving a child an incredible Head Start.

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