

## Knowledge Nuggets from



### **Missouri Department of Social Services--Fathers for Life Project**

**S SITUATION** *describes the context—who was involved, what happened, when and where did it happen, and why? How did it come about?*

The likelihood that children will be successful in life increases when fathers are positively involved in the lives of their children.

The Fathers for Life program serves a population of fathers who are in the criminal justice system. The project seeks to strengthen families and children by working with fathers who are in the criminal justice system- incarcerated, on probation or paroled.

Many of the fathers involved in the Fathers for Life project have begun to build meaningful relationships with their children.

The project is designed intentionally to create systemic changes that could be sustained well after the project ends. As a result, development of a statewide approach, with the sanction of key state agencies and the advisement of a Statewide Steering Committee, remains a key priority throughout the project. The Steering Committee is comprised of directors, coordinators, and other decision-making personnel who represent Missouri Head Start-State Collaboration Office, Missouri Head Start Association, Office of State Courts Administrator, Children's Services Commission, Missouri Area United Methodist Church, M.A.R.C.H. Mediation, Parents as Teachers National Center, University of Missouri Outreach/Extension, University of Missouri-Kansas City, and these Missouri state agencies: Department of Social Services, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Economic Development, Office of Workforce Development, and others.

In previous research with the fathers across the state of Missouri, it was reported that the three most influential areas that truly helped their re-entry to society/community were (in the order listed): **FAMILY, PERSONAL FAITH** and **EMPLOYMENT**.

**H HURDLE**—*describes the challenges to progress or obstacles encountered along the way*

Throughout the planning, development and implementation phases, challenges have occurred in matching the interest and willingness of faith-based partners with achievable activities to delegate to them. At the State level, an excellent faith-based partner with a compatible mission to this project brought interest and effort to the project, but experienced capacity issues. While they could communicate with all local congregations within their denomination about the project, this did not necessarily cultivate local interest and investment. At the local level, the denomination of the State level partner was not necessarily the most appropriate partner with a mission that was aligned with this project. It was difficult to determine which faith-based partners at the local level would have both the capacity and the mission to be involved with the project, and ministerial alliances were not strong networks to assist in that determination.

During the planning phase, the issue of stigma toward ex-offenders within churches was vocalized. It was discovered that churches could either facilitate or hinder re-entry of ex-offenders into their communities, based on their level of acceptance of ex-offenders and their families.

**A ACTION**—*describes the steps that were or were not taken*

S-H-A-R-E is adapted from Art Murray and Jeff Leshner (August 31, 2007) reference to Paul Green's behavior-based approach. Art Murray is co-director of the Enterprise of the Future Program at The George Washington University.

Local level committees included representation from the faith-based organizations of the respective communities.

Local faith-based organizations were cultivated to identify, recruit and train lay members to provide Relationship Enrichment Skills sessions to ex-offender fathers and the mothers of their children. Initial and follow-up trainings occurred in both Tier I sites.

**R RESULT**—*identifies the steps taken/not taken*

Although leader couples were trained in two communities, the role, skill level, and time commitment were too intensive for a number of them to deliver the service.

**E EVALUATION**—*if a similar situation were to occur in the future, offer the best preventive, or corrective measures, based on what you now know*

Based on what is known now, it appears that the role of the faith-based representative at the State level would be for advisement, rather than accessing a state-wide network of support. This would ensure that the roles of faith-based partners would be incorporated in the design of local responses to this issue.

It is advisable to include more variety in the faith-based representation at the local level. Representation of various denominations could enhance the possibility of a match between the mission of the church and the mission of the project, as well as reflect the culture of the target population at the local level. Not only would the partners differ from community to community, but also the roles defined for the faith-based partners would differ, based on their areas of interest and expertise.