

Section 3: Development of Fathers for Life - A Local Community Approach

“The success of Fathers for Life depends to a large degree on the ability of the Head Start program to educate key community agencies and organizations about the project and potential outcomes for fathers and families and enlist their support and involvement. During the demonstration project, Fathers for Life coordinators at Tier 1 sites made presentations at an average of 16 different types of agencies and organizations across the region to raise awareness of the program, pave the way for recruiting participants, and distribute promotional materials” (Fuger & Abel, 2008).

This section contains marketing ideas and tips to promote Fathers for Life in local communities, guidance for identifying agencies and individuals that will form a community based Fathers for Life Steering Team to guide and direct the initiative, and continuous improvement suggestions.

Public Awareness

Public awareness strategies for Fathers for Life are designed to support communities in developing public relations strategies for their fathering programs. They include brochures, sample press releases, handouts, literature, and presentation talking points for a variety of audiences. Fathers for Life promotional tools are designed to:

- Help communities educate participants about the Fathers for Life initiative;
- Educate participants about the importance of fathers;
- Help participants understand some of the issues children and families face when they have family members in prison;
- Help participants understand some of the issues ex-offenders face when they re-enter communities; and
- Educate participants on the programs and services available to fathers re-entering communities and why support structures are so important.

While it is strongly recommended that some of the public awareness tasks, such as the agency presentations, be disseminated to members of the steering team, it is critical to identify an individual and/or team within your agency to handle the coordination of these efforts. Fathers for Life promotional tools include:

- **Talking Points:** Once your community is prepared to provide Fathers for Life interventions, you will educate agencies and organizations about the program in an effort to gain referrals. Because Fathers for Life is a Head Start initiative, it is imperative that staff is knowledgeable about the initiative and the role your agency plays. In Section 5 of this manual, you will find talking points to help Head Start staff introduce Fathers for Life to fathers and mothers. The suggestions in the talking points apply to a wide array of circumstances in which Head Start staff could encounter a father and/or mother who might benefit from the program’s services. One Missouri Head Start program developed a one-page, double-sided, laminated copy of the talking points for their family advocates to use as opportunities arose.

- **Press Releases:** The first two agencies that piloted Fathers for Life, the Missouri Valley Community Action Agency Head Start and the Delta Area Economic Development Corporation Head Start, developed the sample press releases in Section 5 of this manual.
- **Fathers for Life Flyers:** The sample flyers in Section 5 are excellent examples of eye-catching notices that can be distributed to parents through their children, given out at family activities, and posted in Head Start locations as well as in partnering agency offices.

Development and Implementation

Coalitions are often the key to creating effective and sustained systems change within a community. Collaboration creates the opportunity for a group of otherwise unrelated groups and agencies to mobilize a community to work toward a common goal. A diverse and comprehensive coalition can be successful in creating policy, increasing public knowledge, creating a network, and developing innovative solutions to complex problems.

The Fathers for Life model includes a community-based steering team to provide leadership in implementing specialized resources and supports that focus on fathers. A successful Fathers for Life initiative will depend on a strong team committed to the goal of supporting fathers. Members of the Fathers for Life Steering Team can:

- Maintain a knowledge base of all resources and supports available to fathers and learn how to make referrals to them;
- Serve as program advocates for the importance of fatherhood in the community and within their own agencies, identifying and educating stakeholders, making referrals to programs, and creating a community that supports the re-entry into society of fathers involved in the criminal justice system; and
- Serve as a resource group as programs encounter local service delivery issues, thus helping to ensure the program's success.

Building a Team to Mobilize a Community - Before starting any coalition, it is always important to investigate other community teams/groups to make sure a team that addresses your issue does not already exist. One example of an existing team that may include the desired representation of a team to promote Fathers for Life is a community resource council or partnership. If one exists in your community, contact them and discuss their membership and focus. Determine if they have the desire and capacity to play a major role in helping Head Start plan and implement Fathers for Life. If no existing group can assume this important role and a new group is necessary, conduct brainstorming sessions to identify potential members. Who are the community's key leaders? Who are the important stakeholders? Who are the "champions" of this issue?

Choosing Coalition Members - One of the most exciting components of the Fathers for Life initiative is the opportunity for Head Start agencies to forge relationships with organizations outside of the early care community. Programs are encouraged to think broadly about the types

of agencies that serve fathers and families and explore how they could potentially serve the Fathers for Life initiative.

A core group of partner agencies should also be identified. The representative of the potential collaborating partner should be a key decision maker within the agency or organization. It is preferred that they have the ability to make decisions at team meetings without having to seek approval. These representatives are critical to the group's success and are also responsible for recruiting additional members. They should possess strong community networks and a genuine interest in supporting families that face incarceration to be considered for the group.

Once identified, potential members should be contacted personally. This may result in individual meetings to discuss the initiative and the role of the local coalition. Prior to offering invitations, it is important to clearly articulate the expectations of members that join the coalition. How often will you meet? When will you meet? What will you expect of members outside of meeting attendance? Potential members are more likely to join if they feel they have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.

The following agencies and organizations are critical to the success of Fathers for Life and will each make unique contributions:

1. **Probation and Parole** - Many offenders and ex-offenders are supervised in the community by probation/parole officers who help them prepare for a successful re-entry into the community. Conditions of supervision and treatment are determined by such factors as type of offense, criminal history, and other information that will assist in the ongoing evaluation of the offender's needs, successes, and struggles during the re-entry process. Officers are encouraged to help identify fathers of Head Start and Head Start-eligible children, provide information about available supports and resources to fathers, and refer appropriate individuals to Fathers for Life. Probation and parole agencies in previous sites have adapted intake scripts to include a question to determine if a father has children under the age of five and whether or not that child is in Head Start. The steering team member can help develop and deliver specialized training to address officers' ability to identify specific parenting needs and learn about community resources for referral.
2. **Child Support** - The Child Support Enforcement agency (also called the Title IV-D Program) helps parents establish paternity, locate parents, establish or modify child and medical support orders, and collect child support payments. A high percentage of fathers in the criminal justice system have child support orders and upon release from correctional facilities, can owe huge debts. One focus group member from the evaluation study described an example of this situation:

“These men are in their 30s and 40s and had fathered 3 or 4 children [who] are 16 to 30 years old. Over the years, they have accrued \$40,000 to \$60,000 of child support in arrears. At this stage in life, they are getting their first stable job... (Fuger & Abel, 2008).”

Child support staff can help inform clients about available Fathers for Life supports and resources and help identify and refer appropriate individuals. The child support agency representative on the steering team can coordinate the dissemination of information about Fathers for Life to child support field staff and investigate the possibility of the agency developing a policy for partial child support debt waivers.

3. **Parents as Teachers** - Through the use of parent education and family support, the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program helps parents better understand issues pertaining to their child, such as physical, intellectual, and social development. Certified parent educators provide personal visits, parent group meetings, child screenings, and links to other community services. Services are free and available to families throughout pregnancy until their child enters kindergarten. Parents as Teachers can serve as facilitators of the Focus on Fathering curriculum and encourage fathers to participate in personal home visits.
4. **Drug Court** - Individuals whose drug dependency has contributed to their involvement in the criminal justice system are required, through drug courts, to complete various treatment, education, and employment requirements. If the offender is a father required to participate in a parenting education class as part of his treatment plan, he can be referred to Fathers for Life. Drug court representatives who are part of the steering team can coordinate activities between fathers on probation or parole and local courts. They also can help develop policies and procedures addressing father/child relationships for those with a history of domestic violence or child abuse.
5. **Correctional Facility Representatives as Partners** - If a correctional facility is located within the service area of the Head Start program, prison superintendents/wardens can be valuable resources and crucial steering team members. For instance, they can support parenting education sessions being offered inside the facility and instruct corrections staff to provide Fathers for Life brochures and program referrals upon their release from prison.
6. **University Outreach and Extension Representative** - Many states have county-based university outreach and extension offices that have access to satellite broadcasts and host distance learning options for various professions, topics, and populations. Local learning options for Head Start staff, child care providers, and parents are generally preferred for their proximity, familiarity, and access to high-quality content that might not otherwise be available in the community. University outreach and extension staff also can make available to fathers and families free tax return preparation, parent education classes, consumer and financial information sessions, youth programs, nutrition education, anger management workshops, family programs, financial literacy education, and consumer decision-making workshops.
7. **Community Action Agency Representative** - Community action agency representatives can offer services ranging from energy assistance to tax preparation for low-income families.

8. **Workforce Development Agencies** - State agencies responsible for workforce development and economic opportunity can provide job-related services and life skills classes to fathers in correctional facilities and mothers and fathers in the community. Many state-operated workforce development agencies also offer specialized veterans' services.
9. **Faith-based Organizations** - Faith-based organizations can work through local churches to train lay members to facilitate relationship enrichment skills classes. It is advisable to include variety in the faith-based representation at the local level. Faith-based representation at the local level should be varied to reflect the culture of the target population and enhance a possible match between a church's and the project's mission. Not only will the partners differ among communities, but so will the roles defined for the faith-based partners, which should be based on their areas of interest and expertise.

Also included in the steering team should be a Head Start program management representative, a father that is under the supervision of the criminal justice system, and a mother or caretaker of a child who has a father in the corrections system. The parents will be able to provide unique perspectives on identifying and recruiting fathers, as well as valuable insight about how to make the initiative a success.

Local Team Management - At previous sites, the local steering team has been an integral part of project design and implementation. Participating agencies report that many of their most sustainable outcomes can be directly attributed to relationships they have built through the steering teams. If your agency chooses to include a local team component, you will need to select an individual or individuals to manage the team tasks. The skill-set needed to direct a local Fathers for Life initiative and to coordinate services with fathers requires someone who can perform a number of executive functions, including choosing and inviting members to join the team, developing agendas, preparing meeting minutes, and completing other tasks that foster healthy group development. Consideration must be given to organizational capacity and the person's ability to assume these responsibilities. Interviewed Head Start personnel recommended that funding and staffing be scrutinized carefully along with mandated position requirements to ensure success (Fuger & Abel, 2008)

Moving the Group Forward – Meetings that Produce Outcomes for Families

Any coalition's success depends largely on its structure. Many elements contribute to a group's success, but at a minimum, an effective coalition will include:

- A clear statement of common goals;
- Opportunities for joint decision-making;
- Effective meetings focused on the group-identified goals; and
- Strong communication to ensure all members understand what is expected.

Sustainability should be a key consideration when structuring a coalition. Effective community development should include opportunities to build cohesiveness within the group and design programs to meet the community's needs once they are identified.

. Initial meetings will allow the group to learn about their communities, identify agencies that can work with Head Start programs, and solve issues as a team. After the initial meetings, agendas should reflect a pace and direction appropriate to the program needs.

Monthly Meetings - Once all preliminary plans are complete, the steering committee may meet monthly to ensure the project's ongoing success. Meeting agendas should address:

- **Status of the Initiative** - During every stage of the process, group members should be apprised of the project's status. Well-informed members will remain invested in the project.
- **Intervention Reports** - A Head Start representative will report on the status of interventions. What interventions are being offered and where? How many fathers have participated?
- **Roadblocks/Solutions** - The group will discuss any problems that occurred since the last monthly meeting, and how to solve them.
- **Upcoming Training Events** - Monthly meetings will provide an opportunity for group members to hear about upcoming training events and how they could be involved.
- **Agency Updates** - Meetings will allow members to share agency updates to increase opportunities for collaborative work with families.
- **Membership Evaluation** - Meetings should include regular discussions on the steering team and the recruitment of potential members that would make valuable additions to the group.

Section 5 of this manual contains sample agendas, exercises, and handouts for each of the following meetings. Materials can be customized for your program.

Core Group Meeting - Once a core group has been identified and all members have committed to serve on the team, a meeting will be held to begin the community development process. Local Head Start staff will arrange the meeting logistics, provide meeting details to core group members, facilitate the meeting, and take and distribute meeting minutes.

The first group meeting should last about 90 minutes. The meeting will provide the core group with a project overview. Following the overview, the group will review the overall purpose and roles of the local steering committee. The core group will then engage in their first project task. The group should discuss available resources and identify strengths and gaps. Facilitators should guide a discussion to allow the group to identify any additional key stakeholders and members that would bring unique resources and input to the steering committee. During this discussion, the group should identify a high-profile area employer who would be willing to serve on the steering team. Once the group identifies additional members for the steering team, members should decide who will contact and invite the prospective members to the table. The group also should discuss local public relations strategies and logistical issues for future meetings with the entire steering team, including dates, times, and locations.

Steering Team Meeting #1 - Once all members have been selected, the steering team should gather for an introductory meeting. The meeting should last 90 minutes and will resemble the core group meeting. The steering team will receive a project overview, followed by a facilitator-led discussion of the team's purpose and the roles and responsibilities of the individual members. Although the group will likely meet on a monthly basis, meeting frequency may be adjusted to suit the project's needs.

Communication Exercise: Steering team members will be responsible for informing their agency's or organization's members about the project and their potential role. The communication exercise is designed to help members decide what kind of information should be relayed and how. Each team member should receive a copy of the communication exercise. Divide the team into smaller breakout groups of four to six people. Each person in the group will spend about 10 minutes to consider the questions listed on the handout:

- What are the most important things my colleagues should know about this project?
- What will my colleagues need to know to fulfill their role in the project?
- What are the most effective ways to convey this information to my colleagues?
- What types of tools or support do I need to do this?

After completing this individual activity, each member of the breakout group will share their thoughts and get feedback from other members. This exercise should help each member develop an agency's communications plan.

Using the communications plan template provided in Section 5, ask each team member to develop an agency communications plan. The Communications Activity Logs document project activities, which can then be discussed at the monthly steering team meetings.

Steering Team Meeting #2: The second local steering team meeting will last about 60 to 90 minutes. Leaders will begin preparing the group to tailor the project to meet the community's needs. To prepare for this task, members should identify community strengths and challenges and discuss how Fathers for Life interventions fit into their community.

Communication Exercise - Community Survey: Steering Team members will be asked to complete the community survey to identify existing community strengths related to supporting families. Members will have a chance to share their thoughts. Afterward, the group will repeat the process, this time noting community challenges and weaknesses related to supporting families. Discussion of these gaps will progress into an exercise to review the interventions being targeted, as well as the contributions each member of the steering team might make to each effort.

Steering Team Meeting #3 - The third steering team meeting will prepare members for project leadership. Members will spend time learning specific intervention projects, discussing roadblocks that could impede success, and identifying the roles their agencies can play to ensure success.

Communication Exercise - Intervention Rotation: A Head Start staff member will facilitate the intervention rotation exercise, including a discussion of the individual interventions and members' roles in implementing them. The facilitator will go through each intervention, step by step. Following each presentation, the steering team will discuss local implementation of that intervention. The facilitator will ask the group to shape their discussion around the following questions and record their discussion on flip chart paper.

Some questions to consider are:

- What are the potential roadblocks in our community that could impede the project's success?
- How do we address these roadblocks?
- How do we best market this intervention in our community?
- What contributions can each member of your group and the related agency make to help this intervention succeed (i.e. assist in marketing; make referrals, donate facility use, etc.)?

Steering Team Meeting #4 - One role of the steering team will be to build community awareness and market interventions to potential participants. Therefore, the group should participate in a discussion about how best to educate the community. In this meeting, leaders will introduce the project's public awareness tools to the group. Group members will decide if and how these tools will be used, what groups could benefit from presentations, which individuals could deliver presentations, which markets will benefit from marketing efforts, and which action plans will launch promotional activities.

Continuous Improvement

Steering Team - The makeup of the steering team should be evaluated periodically and additional team members added when appropriate. A note-taker should record proceedings from each steering team meeting.

Sustainability - Fathers for Life is designed for integration into Head Start programs without the need for additional staff or a funding. The initiative can produce community wide system changes that will improve long-term outcomes for families involved with the criminal justice system. The steering team structure encourages agencies and organizations to examine current services for these families and improve services to better meet their needs. Professional development will also create long-term changes in how professionals interface with these families. It is important for Head Start staff who work closely with Fathers for Life to regularly update the Head Start director, other key management staff, and the Policy Council on the project's progress. A lesson learned from the pilot program evaluation is that the structures and values of Head Start are consistent with the Fathers for Life model; both hold a strengths-based view of the child in the context of family and community. Building the model into Head Start structures strengthens the potential for sustainability and replication (Fuger & Abel, 2008). The communication exercise completed during the first steering team meeting is an effective tool for members to inform their agencies about the project.

Evaluation - Feedback from Head Start and partnering agencies' staff about challenges and successes should be collected and documented in order to assist the program and community as they consider future services to fathers in the criminal justice system. Facilitators should conduct post-training evaluations and track the development and implementation of interventions and professional development trainings.

Replication - Head Start programs may choose to implement Fathers for Life in select sites within their service areas. Maintaining detailed documentation of the implementation process will increase the likelihood of replication that is based on sound decision-making.