

THE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER ON NON-RESIDENT FATHERS IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Bringing Back the Dads



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Slide 1

Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System

“Is there a difference in child and family outcomes based on non-resident father involvement?”



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Collaboration and Partnerships

NATIONAL AND FEDERAL

- ▣ American Humane
- ▣ American Bar Association, Center on Children and the Law
- ▣ National Fatherhood Initiative
- ▣ Federal Children's Bureau
- ▣ Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement

STATE AND LOCAL

- ▣ Child Welfare
- ▣ Fatherhood Programs
- ▣ Child Support Enforcement
- ▣ The Courts



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The Effects of Father Absence

COSTS

Children of father-absent homes are:

- Five times more likely to live in poverty
- Three times more likely to fail in school
- Two times more likely to develop emotional or behavioral problems
- Two times more likely to abuse drugs
- Two times more likely to be abused and neglected
- Two times more likely to become involved in crime
- Three times more likely to commit suicide

BENEFITS

Studies show that children with involved fathers display:

- better cognitive outcomes, even as infants
- higher self-esteem and less depression as teenagers
- higher grades, test scores, and overall academic achievement
- lower levels of drug and alcohol use
- higher levels of empathy and other pro-social behavior

All data is from Father Facts, 5th Edition, (2007).



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The Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers in the Child Welfare System (QIC-NRF)

- A QIC on non-resident fathers was established because very little meaningful engagement occurs between the child welfare system and fathers.
- Influencing the QIC NRF (Past and Present):
 - What About the Dads
 - More About the Dads
 - CFSR Findings



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What about the Dads?

Findings in the Child Welfare System

- ❑ Workers do not exhaust all identifying and locating resources.
- ❑ Workers consistently ask mothers, but mothers often do not provide helpful information.
- ❑ Multiple barriers make it difficult to locate and contact fathers.
- ❑ Administrators had differing opinions on whether nonresident fathers are “clients.”
- ❑ Differing policies on assessing fathers for placement purposes.
- ❑ Small percentage of fathers comply with offered services.



More about the Dads...

Findings in the Child Welfare System

- Children with involved fathers are more likely to be reunified and less likely to be adopted than children whose fathers are not involved. (Strong relationship between actively engaged fathers; formal support, informal support, and visitation and a decrease in adoptions)
- High levels of adoption for children with unknown fathers and uninvolved fathers may indicate many fathers are only contacted for TPR.
- Children whose fathers provide nonfinancial support appear most likely to experience a reunification discharge.



RECENT CFSR FINDINGS

Father Vs. Mother Involvement



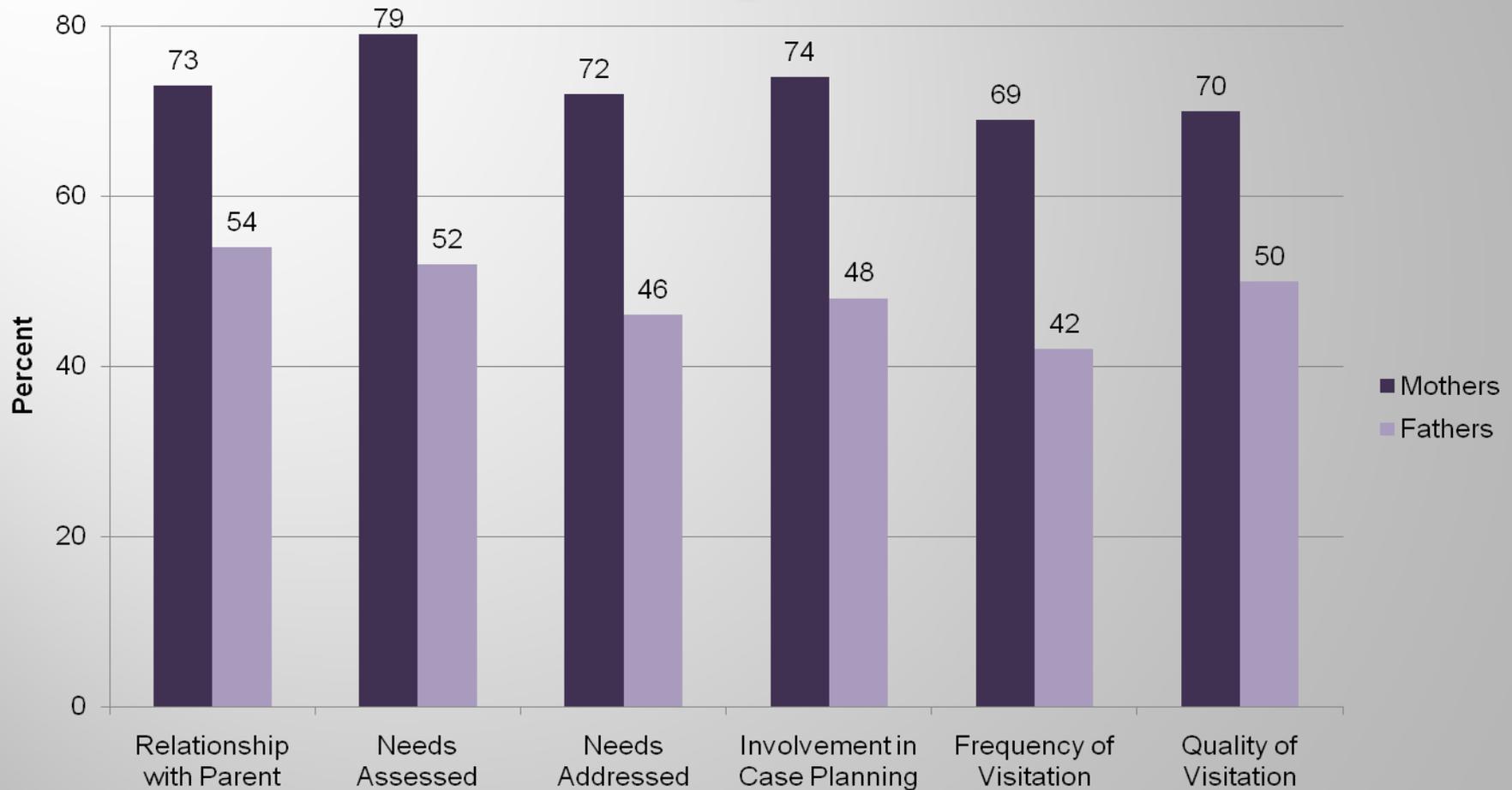
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Case-Level Data: 32 States

Differences In Serving Mothers and Fathers



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Case-Level Data: 32 States

Involvement in Case Planning

Child welfare agencies are making concerted efforts to involve children and parents in case planning in:

Mothers

74% of applicable cases

Fathers

48% of applicable cases

Children

71% of applicable cases



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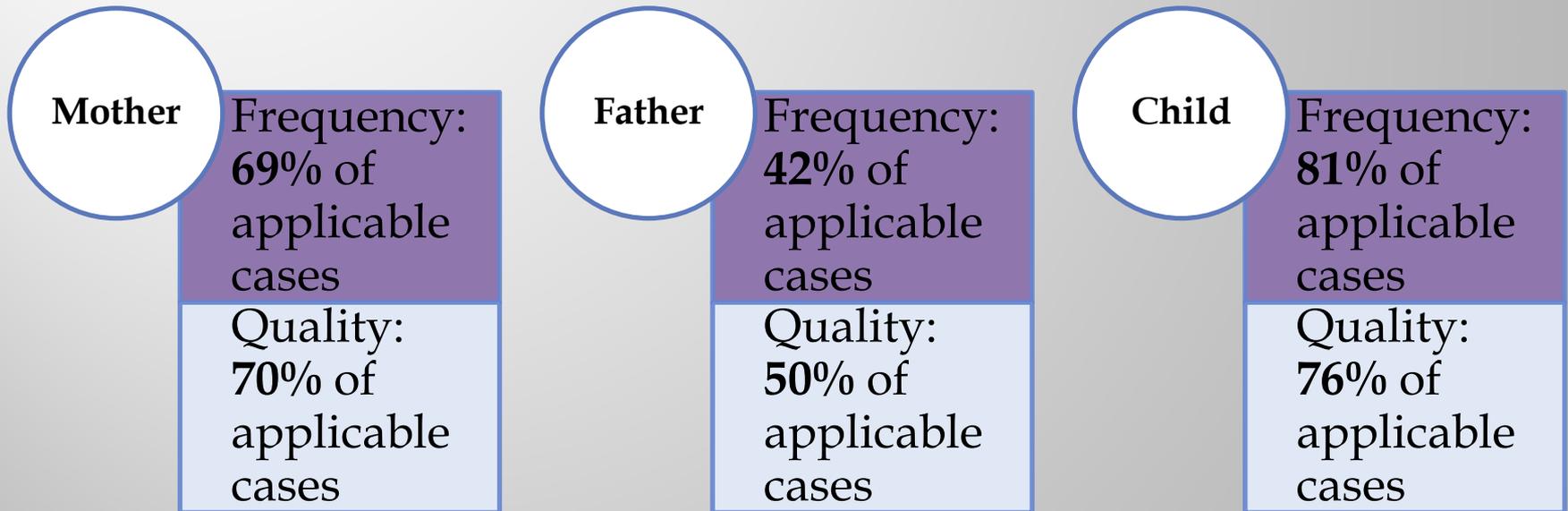


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Case-Level Data: 32 States

Items 19 and 20

The frequency and quality of visits between the caseworker and the parents, and the caseworker and child, were sufficient in:



National Quality Improvement Centers

- Quality Improvement Centers (QICs) are one way the Children's Bureau is attempting to better understand targeted issues in the child welfare field and also stimulate new, research-based responses to those issues
- QICs are awarded funds for a planning phase and an implementation phase



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QIC NRF is Operated by:

- American Humane Association (lead organization)
- American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law
- National Fatherhood Initiative

- A Project of the Children's Bureau
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Administration for Children and Families
US Department of Health and Human Services
2006-2011

- A Member of the Training and Technical Assistance Network

www.fatherhoodqic.org



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Overview of QIC-NRF Approach: An evidence-based approach

- Improve child welfare outcomes by seeking to involve non-resident fathers in their children's lives
- Determine the impact of father involvement on child safety, permanence, and well-being outcomes.
- Inform best practices related to the engagement of non-resident fathers and paternal family
- Enable inter-agency collaboration around father involvement with family and systems
- Build knowledge base around non-resident father engagement in child welfare cases including barriers to practice
- Develop and utilize existing knowledge on fatherhood programming while maintaining a “child-centric approach”



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Five Key Research Themes Used for Information Gathering

Key barriers (or promising practices) found:

Identification

- Not readily ascertainable
- Moms are not forthcoming with information

Location

- Transitional Dads
- Dads move around, are incarcerated, avoidant

Contact

- Efforts do not result in actual “contact” with dad.
- Innovative and promising strategies found



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Five Key Research Themes Used for Information Gathering

Key barriers (or promising practices) found:

Engagement

- Biggest gap in practice
- Approach to working with dads is not a shared concern for good practice
- No “blue-print” to integrate Dads into the child welfare system and sustain their engagement

Interagency Collaboration

- Contradictory or complementary (e.g., law enforcement, CS enforcement, judges, etc.).



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Ideas for Overcoming Legal Barriers to Non-Custodial Father and Paternal Kin Engagement for Children in Foster Care

- Assure early appointment of attorneys for all parents, including non-custodial fathers
- Assure that parents' attorneys do not have inordinately high case loads, and that they receive adequate compensation for diligent representation
- Take advantage of training developed by ABA on representing non-custodial fathers (available at www.fatherhoodqic.org)



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- Address mothers' inability or unwillingness to identify or help locate the non-resident father (e.g., by having her file an affidavit or be examined under oath)
- Target new resources for conducting adequate *and ongoing* diligent searches for NCFs and paternal relatives
- Address legal issues that may discourage fathers from coming forward, such as fears regarding child support obligations, immigration status, pending criminal matters



- Address biases *against* non-resident fathers among legal and judicial professionals, particularly if the father was not, or was minimally, involved in the child's life before the case's inception
- Ensure the Fostering Connections Act's relative notification provisions are followed, and that the domestic violence exception is used only in appropriate circumstances.
- Advocate for agency policy/procedure and state laws requiring prompt action to identify, locate, contact, and engage NCFs



Different State Approaches to NRFs:

- Court can assume jurisdiction based on conduct of one parent; can compel NCF to comply with services (e.g. MI, OH)
- Court can assume jurisdiction based on conduct of one parent, but must award physical custody to NCF absent a finding of unfitness; can compel NCF to comply with services (e.g. CA, FL)
- Court cannot assume jurisdiction if there is one fit parent, regardless of the conduct of the other; before dismissal, can award custody to NCF and enter findings against custodial parent (e.g. MD, PA)



5 Legal/Judicial Prerequisites to Better Engaging NRFs

#1 Understand NCFs' Basic Legal **Rights**

#2 Take Action to Identify/Locate NCFs **Early**

#3 Focus on Addressing NCFs' Right to **Visit** (and help assure that visitation is *enforced*)

#4 Engage NCFs (and paternal kin where appropriate) in **Family Group Conferencing** and most importantly **Case Planning**

#5 Recognize the NCF as a **permanency resource** for the child, especially for **older youth** in care



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THE CHALLENGES

IDENTIFICATION:

- Valuing fathers' relationships with children
- Non-resident fathers not in the casework paradigm
- Time constraints prior to removal hearing
 - Investigation and removal
 - Diligent search- who?
- Gatekeeper issues- Mother or maternal family unwilling to provide information on father
- Father information based on what mother says
- No way to query fathers' names in case management system – Multiple identifying numbers for same father?
- Custody & Child Support orders not reviewed in diligent search for father

LOCATION:

- Frequent moves
- Job changes / unemployment
- Pre-paid cellular phones



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THE CHALLENGES

ENGAGEMENT

- Engagement?

“I met with the father, got his signed waiver of service, had him sign his service plan, and set up visitation. I gave him my card and told him to call me if he has any questions. I don't call parents to check up on them, but I do return calls.”

- Out of area

- Incarceration

- Adversarial nature of court-related correspondence– “Termination” letters often first they see

- Fathers fearful of court

- Distrust of child welfare institution and case workers

- Fathers waiting on instruction from child welfare workers– hesitance to speak with third party

- Some don't understand the paperwork they receive or the case worker speak

- Inability to relate professionally with case worker– vice versa

- Accommodating schedules, i.e. WORK



TEXAS

Who We Are

What We've Done

Collaborative Partners

Father's Advisory Council



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Lessons Learned

1. Partnerships are Essential–

Child Welfare Agency

Service providers

Courts

All sharing vision, assets, burden, successes



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Lessons Learned

2. Outreach to Child Welfare Workers

Making fatherhood explicit in family connections
through

Trainings

Focus Groups

One-on-one Interactions



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Lessons Learned

TRAINING-Making fatherhood explicit in family connections

- Ensures fatherhood awareness and input on engagement standards – **from Caseworker to Case Analyst**
- Reinforces the value of family connections
- Resulting in more and better identifying information
- Better working relationships between case workers and fatherhood initiative
- Keeps the fatherhood initiative in view
- Evaluations provide insight for more specific training opportunities
- Allows opportunities to train for differential engagement strategies



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Lessons Learned

TRAINING- Audiences

- Investigators
- Caseworkers
- Supervisors
- Casa's
- Court Appointed Attorneys
- Ad-litem
- District Attorneys
- Judges
- State Court Improvement Programs
- Case Analysts



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Lessons Learned

TRAINING- Topics

- Value of fathers in child well-being
- Valuing family connections for children
- Understanding struggles and aspirations of fragile families
- Identifying and building on strengths for parent success
- Representing non-resident fathers in child welfare cases
- Redefining engagement- and the EXTENT of engagement
- Engagement strategies



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Lessons Learned

FOCUS GROUPS

- Shows value of opinions and expertise of case workers
- Allows workers to raise concerns
- Provides management and Fatherhood Initiative with front-line insight
- Relationship building with smaller group

ONE-ON-ONE INTERACTION

- Provides Fatherhood Initiative with direct insight into each case
- Builds trust

By-product of outreach to child welfare workers is free sharing of information



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Lessons Learned

“Two and a half years into the project, caseworkers are now referring fathers to NewDay Services for fatherhood classes; case notes more frequently mention a search for the non-residential father, even when mother says she doesn’t know who he is; fathers who have been in the fatherhood classes are recommending them to friends who may have CPS cases; and courts are working hand in hand with NewDay Services and CPS attorneys to find and encourage non-residential fathers to take advantage of services offered under the QIC NRF grant.”

--Nancy Dahle – Project coordinator



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Lessons Learned

3. Point Person Necessary Within Child Welfare Agency

Increased speed of ID and location of fathers through

- Data mining for pertinent & missing information
- Continually communicating directly with caseworkers and departments to update father info

Provided more efficient delivery of eligibility criteria to qualify or disqualify fathers for our project

Provided urgency / accountability

Return to older cases for updated information



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Lessons Learned

Point Person Necessary Within Child Welfare Agency

Texas: Of the 116 fathers identified prior to coordinator, 49 had too little information to consider eligible for our project. After coordinator began documenting petitions and interfacing with investigators and caseworkers, the number having too little information dropped to 27. (81% increase in %age of good, identifying & qualifying information)



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Lessons Learned

4. Full-time Engagement Specialist / Case Manager

- Engage father—when/where necessary
- Do initial needs assessment and make referrals
- Establish relationship—Success 101.
- Educate fathers about child welfare system, players, goals, service planning, etc.
- Educate fathers about their rights & responsibilities
- Encourage fathers to engage caseworkers, CASA's, and other stakeholders



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Lessons Learned

5. Early and consistent engagement a key to getting fathers into service planning and toward success

Sense of “lost-ness” when dads come in after initial court hearings



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Lessons Learned

6. Fragility

- Many of the dads have good intentions while also living with “fits and starts”
- Fathers view caseworkers as “gatekeepers” and seem to await instruction from them
- Personal contact with caseworkers is seen as encouraging and helpful by fathers
- A little “hand-holding” up front may result in increased participation by fathers
- Fathers indicate education about child welfare system to be very helpful



INDIANA

Who We Are

What We've Done

Collaborative Partners

Father's Advisory Council



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WASHINGTON

Who We Are

What We've Done

Collaborative Partners

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Lessons Learned

▣ Identification

- Advise mothers on the value of father engagement in the hopes that it results in father identification
- Provide social workers with support to engage in the father search process; the search process can be time-consuming but can potentially have great results
- Review, adjust if needed, and enforce timely paternity test practice
- Create and place father-friendly information (posters and brochures) where fathers are likely to find it (barber shops, grocery stores, support offices, courts, educational resource walls); some may “come to you”
- Educate the professionals who work with fathers and mothers about the value of father involvement (trainings, workshops, panel presentations, informal education during meetings)
- Create a father advisory panel that reviews documents, provides feedback to processes, and offers insights on ways to identify, locate and engage fathers



Lessons Learned

▣ Location

- Follow all potential leads [e.g., search for fathers' name in child welfare computer system (for him as a child and adult); search out paternal kin, review prior referrals for mention of father or paternal relatives
- Check for incarceration with state and local incarceration logs which is on-line information with public access
- Check with Child Support Enforcement computer system for potential contact information.
- Internet telephone directory search



Lessons Learned

▣ Engagement

- Be willing to schedule the initial meeting at a location comfortable to the father--a neutral community location or in his home
- Review current policies (including language) to ensure they are inclusive and specifically name fathers as well as mothers
- Revise/create/implement various father engagement approaches in order to successfully connect with fathers based on individual situations (e.g., they live out of area, are in jail, present mental and/or physical health concerns, are homeless or nearly homeless)
- As with mothers, work with fathers to get them the supports and services they need, including father support and educational groups



Lessons Learned

▣ Engagement (continued)

- Start with the assumption that all fathers want to be engaged; male socialization, a father's childhood or adult experiences may necessitate intentional listening and outreach skills with individual fathers
- Most fathers will have a need to tell his side of the story to explain the actions he has taken, be patient, be interested and allow him to tell his story.
- Talk to fathers honestly about both their rights to and responsibilities for their children
- Provide fathers access to clearly-written and easy to read information about how the "system" works and give them skills to navigate the process, including but not limited to supportive personal assistance
- Examine and be prepared to change your own beliefs, values, fears, and thoughts about the role of fathers and father engagement – read more and reach out to fathers you know and trust for insights



Lessons Learned

▣ What we have done to date-

- Meeting with Administrators and Lunch with Dads (lunch provided to social workers and dad panel)
- Panel presentations
- Participation on committees
- Legal brochure
- Posters and fliers (targeting fathers and professionals)
- Engage in local evaluation and assessment efforts and share findings



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IMPORTANCE OF REACHING OUT TO CHILD WELFARE WORKERS

TRAINING

- Reinforces the value of family connections
- Resulting in more and better identifying information
- Better working relationships between case workers and fatherhood initiative
- Keeps the fatherhood initiative in view
- Evaluations provide insight for more specific training opportunities
- Allows opportunities to train for differential engagement strategies



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ISSUES / CHALLENGES OF WORKING WITH MOTHERS

GATEKEEPING

- Gatekeeper issues- Mother or maternal family unwilling to provide information on father

FAMILY CENTERED APPROACH

- Need to express value of ALL family connections for children
- Supportive engagement of mothers along with fathers

HANDOUT- “The Voice of Our Mothers”

- Texas conducted a Mothers’ Focus Group which provides insight into working with mothers who may be hesitant to provide paternal information.



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POLICY / LEGAL ISSUES: VALUING FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Need for “Engagement Policy/Practice Clarification Statement”

- Define engagement in all phases of case practice
- Clarify expectations for identifying and locating fathers and for differential engagement (from- Institutionalizing Fatherhood Engagement: The Massachusetts Model Fernando Mederos, Director of Massachusetts Department of Children and Families Initiative)

ATTORNEY and COURT

- Court valuing family connections & father engagement
- Court involvement in Child Welfare collaborations
- Court ordered time constraints for case planning
- Acquiring family information from the bench
 - Require sworn affidavits from resident parent
- Modifying & Verifying the Child Support Orders
- Enforceable Access Visitation Language



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POLICY / LEGAL ISSUES: VALUING FAMILY CONNECTIONS

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

- Putting family engagement into practice at all levels of service
 - Retraining from a maternal centered approach to a family centered approach
- Creating a system that fosters family connections
 - Modify paperwork and case management database to foster “Family” language
 - Ex . Tarrant County, TX. Petition Information Sheet
 - Include genogram software to follow families rather than individual cases



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POLICY / LEGAL ISSUES: DILIGENT SEARCH

What the Investigative and CVS Supervisors in Tarrant County request:

Investigators:

- Need a 72 hour turn around in request, otherwise the case has moved on.
- Include search of Medicaid, food stamp, Child Care Management records
- Establish liaisons with each of above agencies

CVS:

- Continuing to do diligent searches throughout the history of the case
- Continuous reviews of case histories (data mining) for father
- Query ability in state CPS database to find same person with different ID #
- Easily accessible/updatable GENOGRAM software; follows family, not case

Other:

- Cite-by-publication may be used too frequently in lieu of a thorough diligent search



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CONCLUSION

Why are we here?

*To achieve the best possible outcomes for children

*in the most efficient way.

Fostering family connections early to build on family strengths may provide a better framework for child well-being and court efficiency.



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Discussion and Questions

<http://www.fatherhoodqic.org/>



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Contact us for more information...

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