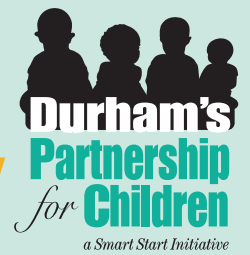


Fatherhood Report: Determining a Course of Action for Durham County



Executive Summary | August 2007



Durham's Partnership for Children, A Smart Start Initiative

For the full report, visit www.dpfc.net

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Foreword

Since 1995, Durham's Partnership for Children, recipient of Durham County's Smart Start grant, has been a funding agent, an organizer and a community catalyst for efforts to support the needs of young children in Durham County. During that time, the organization has made significant progress in improving the state of early care and education in our community. We have witnessed a 31% increase in the number of high quality child care centers in Durham County and a 58% increase in the number of young children enrolled in high quality child care.

Though remarkable progress has been made, the Partnership remains cognizant of the fact that even with our very best efforts, many children and families in Durham County lack the services they need or the knowledge to receive them. As an organization that aspires to serve all the children birth to five of Durham County, we continue to look for ways to engage and serve these unserved populations.

The Allocations Committee and the Partnership Board recognized that as we looked at finding and filling the gaps in services that exist in Durham County, we needed additional information on services for fathers. Therefore, the Partnership commissioned a study in 2007 to look at fatherhood services and provide recommendations for the future. The Partnership contracted with Marsha Munn to conduct this study, and the following executive summary represents a look at the work prepared.

As with any report, this summary offers an overview of a substantial amount of data discussed in the full report. As an agency committed to collaboration, we are aware that our readers may bring to bear additional insights into this data, as well. As a catalyst for future discussion, we encourage anyone interested to read the full report, which will be available online at www.dpfc.net. You can also contact us at mail@dpfc.net. We are very pleased to share this executive summary with you and we welcome your feedback.

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Overview

Fatherhood is a growing interest to many human service organizations around the country as different models emerge, research is more prevalent and the findings are more conclusive. Durham's Partnership for Children is no exception. As a first step in identifying the needs and existing resources around promoting father involvement, the Partnership commissioned this report. In preparing this report, the contractor reviewed research on the effects of father absence, effective practices and curricula and interviewed individuals at relevant Durham agencies and organizations and other local, state and national fatherhood programs.

The statistics are sobering. More than 27 percent of North Carolina families do not have fathers present in the home (12th highest in the nation). Moreover, almost half of the fathers who do not live with their children have no contact with their children at all. Children who grow up without their fathers are significantly more likely to live in poverty, and, while father-absence occurs at all income levels, the effects for low-income children are particularly devastating. In Durham, the percent of female headed families living below the poverty level with no husband/father present was 33 percent compared to 3.3 percent for married couples. Young children are disproportionately affected; children under age 5 living with single mothers are 20 times more likely to live below the poverty level than those where the father/husband is present.

Research confirms that fathers play a crucial and

unique role in the healthy development of their children, and their absence has a number of negative effects, including increased risk of negative physical, cognitive, behavioral and academic outcomes. For example, children who grow up without their fathers are twice as likely to repeat a grade or be suspended. And, most low-income, absent fathers are the products of father-absent households, so the cycle tends to repeat itself.

Where is the gap in existing fatherhood programming?

In Durham County, there are a few programs focused specifically on fathers. Most programs indicated that they do not have the staff or financial resources to implement a well designed plan. Yet, these programs also recognize fathers are a missing, but important client component in their agencies' programming, and identified many groups of high-risk fathers in need of help in Durham: low income people, teens, Hispanic people, African American people, incarcerated dads and dads at risk of incarceration because of child support enforcement violations/nonpayments. While there are often programs for mothers in these groups or programs for parents, few agencies provide services specifically for fathers.

What we have learned from the many local, state and national fatherhood initiatives operating over the past 10-20 years is that interventions with fathers do work and can lead to desirable outcomes. There is no one right solution. Rather, there are multiple tools and strategies that work depending on the needs of the population served, the outcomes desired, the project staffing and funding level. The common thread is a comprehensive approach including a wide array of education and support services.

“Our dads are isolated, have low self-esteem, work many hours and have few social outlets.” – Katuska Olave

Recommendations

“Many dads want to help their children but can barely take care of themselves. They aren’t ‘deadbeat but dead broke.’”
– Jimmy Lewis, Durham Family Courts

Keys to successful fatherhood programs

Planning: A thorough planning process should include research of evidence-based practices in recruitment, programming, and curriculum. It is recommended that projects start small and expand gradually.

Recruitment: Traditional recruitment methods typically do not work. Getting fathers involved is easier if the program already has a connection to the families, such as reaching out to mothers who are involved with similar programs to refer their children’s fathers. Also, programs and program participants should reach out to other men in the places they congregate, such as barbershops, basketball courts, churches, etc.

Staffing: Like any effective program, staff members—case workers, parent educators and facilitators — are the key to its success. The ability to build relationships is paramount in addressing the barriers fathers face and the factors that contribute to their lack of involvement in their children’s lives. In order for fatherhood programs to be effective,

program staff as well as other frontline personnel working with fathers, must receive extensive training.

Content: Most men who come to fatherhood programs are interested in more than finding a job and paying their child support. Program content should cover topics, such as child development, parenting skills and positive family communication, including practices that support effective co-parenting. Differences do exist among certain groups of fathers. The key is to tailor program approaches to different population needs and preferences. Moreover, almost all the interviewees mentioned the importance of including male-oriented activities in the program.

Recommended strategies for supporting fatherhood initiatives

Based on information gleaned from research, effective practice models and the Durham community, these are recommendations for roles the Partnership could play in developing a supportive community for fathers. They are divided into two areas.

1. Funding of direct services to fathers through local agencies and organization.

- Determine the population of fathers to serve and the outcomes desired. Focus efforts and funds on those known to have the most risk factors may be a more targeted approach. For example, prenatal interventions have shown to be very effective. A program for expectant dads could be integrated into broader education and support programs for healthy families that already exist in the community.
- Award any approved projects the resources needed to succeed, including time and money. Allow a year of funded planning.
- Utilize a collaborative approach where existing fatherhood programs

and interested partners help in planning and implementing the program. Any new programming should compliment existing programs.

- Mandate within Request for Proposals that services must include specific expectations around best practices.
- ### 2. Acting as a convener/catalyst for a community-wide effort to address the issues in a broader, more systemic manner.

- Build on what is already occurring in the community to facilitate a process to create a community-wide plan to serve fathers more effectively.
- Provide or broker technical assistance and training to agencies and direct service providers serving fathers or wanting to serve fathers. For example, the Partnership could:

1) Host and/or fund regularly scheduled fatherhood roundtable discussions or “lunch and learn” presentations for interested partners around common issues and concerns.

2) Spearhead the use of a self-assessment and planning tool that helps family service programs assess their organization’s readiness to provide services to fathers; and/or sponsor training on working with fathers for those people working with families but traditionally focused on serving women.

- Fund a facilitated work group to focus on changing policies and attitudes that serve as barriers to needed services.

- Conduct a public awareness campaign around the issue of fathers’ role in the healthy development of their children and to dispel myths about “deadbeat dads”.



“Absent fathers do realize their children face difficulties without them. They’re veterans, many having come from fatherless homes, and they know the hurdles their children face. Many fathers want a second chance to help their children better navigate life’s waters. Being involved in a fatherhood program gives them that chance.”

– Sisters of Charity Foundation

Acknowledgements

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