



## NATIONAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER ON NON-RESIDENT FATHERS AND THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

### **Brief Project Descriptions**

#### **Introduction and Overview**

The Children's Bureau funded the American Humane Association and its partners, the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, and National Fatherhood Initiative, to create a quality improvement center on non-resident fathers. The focus for the project came as a result of the Federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) and the *What About the Dads?* report. Both the CFSRs on state child welfare systems and the *What About the Dads?* report indicate there is very little meaningful engagement occurring between the child welfare system and fathers. Using this information as a foundation, the Quality Improvement Center (QIC-NRF) was designed to promote additional knowledge development regarding the engagement of non-resident fathers and their children who are involved in the child welfare system.

The purpose of this project is to determine, through a random assignment research design, the impact of non-resident father involvement on child welfare outcomes. Child welfare outcomes include child safety, permanence and well-being. Included in this design is the examination of the relationship between child and non-resident fathers or paternal relatives. Throughout the five years of this project, information gained from the QIC-NRF will be disseminated to the Children's Bureau, sub-grantees, child welfare agencies, private service providers, the courts and legal systems, and other stakeholders.

#### **The QIC-NRF goals are:**

- To promote and support a research-based and outcome-focused approach to inform best practices related to the engagement of non-resident fathers and paternal family in the public child welfare system.
- To promote and support a research-based and outcome-focused approach to determine the impact of father involvement on child safety, permanence and well-being outcomes.
- To facilitate a collaborative information-sharing and problem-solving national network among sub-grantees, the Children's Bureau, public child welfare agencies, private service providers, the courts and legal systems, and other stakeholders.

In furtherance of these goals, the QIC has selected four projects to fund for model intervention and evaluation around father engagement and systemic collaboration to strengthen, through father engagement, families with children in the foster care system.

Each of the four QIC projects will be implemented by a collaboration led by the county office of a public Child Protection agency. All projects have father-oriented procedures in place for locating and contacting non-resident fathers of children in the foster care system, and all have established relationships with community organizations offering support to fathers and to promoting paternal responsibility. In accordance with QIC specifications, the four projects propose to have a male initiate contact. All four have established the groundwork for a random-assignment research design with closely followed treatment and control groups. A model intervention curriculum for 20 weekly peer-led support groups developed under a supplemental grant will be offered to the members of the treatment groups. All four subgrantees have assembled an array of community supports to offer fathers assistance as needed.

Each subgrantee has retained an outside evaluator to gather and analyze qualitative data from families, workers and collateral professionals, as well as quantitative data from administrative sources at several points in time. Evaluations will measure fidelity to model, process, and the degree to which the proposed interventions successfully promoted father engagement. Also, through father engagement, evaluators will measure desired father outcomes of ease of navigating through the child welfare system and desired child outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being.

## **Fathers and Families Center & Indiana Department of Child Services**

### **Engaging Non-Resident Fathers**

The Indiana Department of Child Services (in Indianapolis) will collaborate with an array of partners to offer the 20-week peer-led support group in the program designed by the QIC-NRF Supplemental Project team.

Partners include:

- Indiana Fathers and Families Center started in 1993 as an organization supporting young fathers in their efforts to gain a GED. Incorporating as a 501(c)3 in 1998, the organization has expanded the range of its services to young fathers and will house the project and provide a full-time staff member to lead.
- Indiana University School of Social Work will provide the external evaluation for the project.
- Indiana Dept. of Child Services Child Support Bureau-Tiffany Mitchell, Program Manager, will assist in locating non-resident dads and will work with dads who need additional supports.

To supplement the peer-led support group, fathers in the intervention group will be offered:

- Legal support-advocacy letters to the courts,
- Legal fees;
- Transportation-reinstatement of a driver's license, car repair, bus ticket;
- Assistance in finding housing, child care, clothing, food, education;
- Technical training, and
- Mental health and other referrals.

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**The Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), which is a division of the Department of Social and Health Services for the State of WA: Region IV (King County)**

**Fathers Engagement Project**

Under the management of the Community Engagement Initiative at the University of Washington School of Social work, two local fatherhood programs Divine Alternatives for Dads (DAD) & Fathers In Need, will offer the fatherhood support groups. The work of this program will be supplemented by the Fatherhood Advisory Group, to be convened by the Catalyst for Kids Program.

Collaboration partners have a history of productive work in child welfare and in father engagement:

- The Divine Alternatives for Dads was founded in 2003 to provide services for non-resident dads in the Seattle area. Among the services provided are: Child Support Management, child support management, parent involvement (visitation, parenting plans), reunification, parenting training, support groups and case management;
- The Catalyst for Kids is a statewide collaboration of DCFS, the Superior Court, attorneys, educators/researchers, community service providers, and constituents working in partnership to strengthen the child welfare system;
- The Community Engagement Initiative at the University of Washington School of Social work, has educated, trained, evaluated and informed the social program community with its research since 1979. The Institute will provide project management and evaluation.

The evaluation team, housed at the Community Engagement Initiative at the University of Washington School of Social work will use a mixed methods approach to collect extensive demographic, process, and outcome data to examine how this set of interventions promotes desirable child welfare outcomes.

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## El Paso County (Colorado Springs)

El Paso County Department of Human Services has been active in Fathering programs for 12 years. They are working and/or contracting with several of their long time partners for this project:

- The Center for Fathering, operating since 1995, which offers a variety of services for dads, will house the principal intervention, using the curriculum developed under the auspices of the Non-Resident Fathers Supplemental Grant;
- Policy Studies Inc (PSI) provides all Child Support Services (including the diligent search for absent parents/establishing paternity) and, for this project, also houses the Parenting Opportunity Program (POP) which does case mgt, mediation, dispute resolution, employment/ job readiness (with Goodwill Industries Opportunity Program). For this project, PSI will provide locating services, as well as job readiness services in conjunction with Goodwill Industries;
- Community Partnership for Child Development (CCPD) operates through Head Start and offers groups for fathers, activities to do with kids, how to read to your kids, parenting classes and a dads as mentors program;
- Goodwill Industries will continue in its partnership with Policy Studies, Inc. go provide employment readiness for the program fathers; and the
- The Center for Policy Research in Denver (CPR) is well known in Colorado for a number of studies in Child Welfare, Child Support, Incarceration and other social programs. CPR will serve as evaluator of the project.

In addition to the research questions pursued by all sites around the safety, permanency and well-being of children as a result of increased engagement of fathers, the El Paso County collaboration will examine the factors which may influence a father's decision to participate to begin with and will examine the ways in which a father's interaction with various systems may change for the better.

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## **Texas Department of Family And Protective Services (Tarrant County), Texas (Ft. Worth)**

The Texas DFPS Child Protective Services (CPS) Division will partner with members of the Tarrant County Fatherhood Coalition to provide the model intervention program to non-resident fathers with the aim of determining the impact of non-resident fatherhood involvement on the outcomes for children in the care of DFPS. The Tarrant County Fatherhood Coalition consists of about 40 organizations working to promote responsible fatherhood in Tarrant County.

The members of the Coalition who will collaborate to implement the present program are:

- New Day New Day Services for Children and Families is a faith-based non-profit that offers help and hope to families and individuals involved in Tarrant County Family and Juvenile Courts. New Day Services will house the peer-led support groups;
- Tarrant County Workforce Development Board (Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County). Workforce Solutions has been in operation since 1998 and was instrumental in forming the Tarrant County Fatherhood Coalition. It provides resources and assistance to jobseekers and small businesses in Tarrant County. Workforce Solutions will assist in the job readiness portions of the curriculum;
- Foundation Communities is a non-profit organization that provides affordable housing, community learning centers, supporting housing, and asset building opportunities, such as financial education workshops. Foundation Communities will provide practical information and support in the areas of tax and financial planning;
- the Tarrant County Safety Net is a virtual community network of services that connects clients to educational and employment opportunities with essential services; and
- Child Trends, Based in Washington, D.C., will establish a rigorous experimental research design for a comprehensive evaluation of the proposed project.

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