RECRUITING AND RETAINING FATHERS: STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING YOUNG MEN IN PARENT SUPPORT PROGRAMS

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Opening Doors: Engaging and Embracing Young Fathers
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AGENDA

• Introductions
• Review of Fatherhood Literature
• Unique Considerations & Needs of Young Fathers
• Best Practices for Working with Fathers
• Generations REM Model of Fatherhood Engagement
• Trauma-Informed Services
• Case Study: Healthy Generations Program
• Workshop Group Activity: PICK Analysis
• Discussion
OBJECTIVES

• Identify the opportunities associated with developing programs for teen fathers

• Describe common challenges to recruiting, retaining and engaging young fathers

• Identify strategies to recruiting, retaining and engaging young fathers, particularly diverse groups touching on considerations such as staff, program structure and program services, and incentives
SHARE OUT

• What are the needs of young fathers?
• How do the needs of young fathers differ from those of mothers?
• What has been challenging about getting dads involved in programs?
• What has worked in engaging fathers in programs?
Fatherhood Research

- Father involvement has long been an area of interest of social service providers, researchers, and policymakers (Lamb, Pleck, & Charnov, 1987)
  - Interest in nonresidential fathers increased during 1970’s-1980’s
  - Research on young fathers increased following an increase in unmarried parenthood among young mothers
- Conceptualizations of father involvement have varied over time (Lamb, 2008)
  - Interaction
  - Availability
  - Responsibility
- Father involvement has been associated with positive child outcomes
  - Socio-emotional development & well-being (Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; Goncy & van Dulmen, 2010)
  - Attachment security (Brown, Mangelsdorf, & Neff, 2012)
  - Prosocial behaviors (Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009)
  - Reduced risk of internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009)
UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS AND NEEDS OF YOUNG FATHERS

• Factors that place young men at risk for becoming fathers complicate fathering (Thornberry, 1997)
• Unsafe communities endanger young men and limit mobility (Roy, 2004)
• Fathers 2-3 years older than mothers, on average (Duberstein, Sonenstein, Ku, & Martinez, 1997)

• Coparenting Relationships
  • Dynamic nature of relationships (Arnett, 2004)
  • Dissolution of romantic relationships
UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS AND NEEDS OF YOUNG FATHERS

• Constrained economic prospects facing young men
  • Disproportionate disconnection among young, low-income men (Jekielek & Brown, 2005; Corcoran & Matsudaira, 2005)
  • The quality of the co-parenting relationship and paternal involvement has been associated with fathers’ employment status
  • Young men who are disconnected from school and work are at higher risk for poverty, welfare receipt, and having children who are raised in single-parent households (Brown & Emig, 1999).

• Becoming a father may impel young men to “settle down,” find direction, and consider the needs of others (Palkovitz, 2002).
COMPONENTS OF FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS

- Parenting education
- Responsible decision-making
- Mentoring Relationships
- Mediation services
- Child support Education
- Conflict resolution
- Coping with stress
- Problem-solving skills
- Value Development

(Solomon-Fears, 2007)
BARRIERS TO FATHERS’ PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAMS

- Housing and residential instability
- Father characteristics
- Pragmatic/structural program issues
- Challenging social contexts
- Fathers’ perceptions

Barriers to Fathers’ Participation in Programs
BEST PRACTICES OF WORKING WITH FATHERS

- Culturally appropriate approaches
  - Targeted curricula
  - Methods
  - Materials
- Staff & stakeholder buy-in
- Quality and Adequate staffing
  - Knowledgeable and experienced staff
  - High staff-to-participant ratio
- Grounded in theory of change
- Multimodal opportunities for engagement
- Longitudinal and flexible enrollment
- Engaging in one-on-one relationships with fathers
- Use of an incentive to fathers and or their families
- Meet fathers where they are
GENERATIONS YOUNG FATHERHOOD
REM MODEL

R - Recruitment
E - Engagement
M - Maintaining Relationships
Recruitment

• School Strategies

• “Natural gatekeepers”
  • Coaches
  • Young mothers
  • Custodial workers
  • Administrative staff/teachers
Recruitment

• School Strategies (cont.)
  • Advertisement/Marketing Strategies
    • Classroom announcements/presentations
    • Flyers
    • School-wide functions/Events
    • Existing fathers/mothers in the school
    • Related programs within school
    • “Hallway” recruitment
GENERATIONS REM MODEL

Recruitment

• Community Strategies
  • Partnerships with recognized names and programs in the community
  • Outreach at community/neighborhood events
  • Provide/Collaborate with job readiness/employment services
  • Visit local health clinics/Flyers
  • Visit centers where parents enroll in public benefits
    • WIC Centers
ENGAGEMENT

School Strategies

• Provide young fatherhood groups
  • Connect to their concerns (i.e. co-parenting)
  • Relevant topics
  • Semi-structured
  • Incentives
  • Use media/current events to assist in delivery
  • Bring in outside speakers (i.e. Job Corps, program graduates)
Engagement

• School Strategies (cont.)
  • Employment Services
    • Job Readiness/Training
    • Ongoing jobs listings
  • Text Messaging/Email/Phone
    • Ongoing check-ins
    • Persistence
Engagement

• Community Strategies (cont.)
  • Provide or partner with employment services
    • Job-readiness services (i.e. resume, cover letter, etc.)
    • Job training programs (i.e. Goodwill Education and Career Services)
  • Educational/Family events or outings (i.e. Father’s Day tie drive, family day picnic, community service day with child, museums)
Maintaining Relationships

• School strategies
  • Consistent and ongoing communication with key school personnel concerning young fathers
    • Individual consultations
  • Attending extra-curricular school events
  • Use of texts/social media to maintain communication
  • Consistent presence/SPACE
  • Case management Services
    • i.e. housing, benefits, legal/employment services
GENERATIONS REM MODEL

Maintaining Relationships

• Community strategies
  • Use of texts/social media to maintain communication with young fathers
  • Provide ongoing listing of job resources/postings
  • Conduct workshops centered on job readiness and other fatherhood topics
  • Attempt to create working space in the target community
  • Community outings/educational trips/conferences
  • Case management Services
    • i.e. housing, benefits, legal/employment services
TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

• Safety – providing safe physical/emotional space for young fathers to engage
• Trustworthiness – building trusting relationships
• Choice – conducting needs assessment to determine appropriate services for fathers
• Collaboration – working in partnership with young fathers
• Empowerment - encouraging skill-building and working to remove individual and systemic barriers.

(Harris & Fallot, 2001)
CASE STUDY: HEALTHY GENERATIONS FATHERHOOD PROGRAM

- Overview of Program
- Portrait of Fathers
- Needs Assessment
- REM Model applied to Generations Program
WORKSHOP ACTIVITY: PICK ANALYSIS GUIDELINES

1. Individual Component
   • Brainstorm challenges your program experiences when attempting to engage fathers
   • Pick ONE (1) challenge to present to small group

2. Small Group: Brainstorm
   • Present challenge to small group
   • Group members brainstorm ideas to address the challenge (write these ideas on post-it notes)

3. Small Group: PICK Chart Categorization of ideas
   • Possible - Low payoff, easy to do
   • Implement - High payoff, easy to do
   • Challenge –High payoff, hard to do
   • Kill – Low payoff, hard to do
   • Repeat with each group member
SHARE OUT

• For Discussion
  • What strategies/ideas will implement immediately? (Implement)
  • What strategies/ideas will you need to develop strategic plans to realize? (Challenge)
  • What was most helpful about today’s session? What could have been more helpful?

• Thoughts to consider as you depart:
  • What will you take from today’s discussion?
  • Who will you contact to help you improve your father services?
    • People you met today at this conference
    • People/stakeholders/organizations in your community
THANK YOU!
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