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## **Father Talks ... fathers connecting with their children**

### **Fatherhood Practitioner Pays It Forward**

A philosopher once said that “service is the rent one pays for their space here on earth.” Charles Harrison strongly adheres to this piece of philosophy.

Charles was the youngest of 7 children. He came from a tight knit family that taught him to respect his elders and take responsibility for his actions. (As a matter of fact, his parents are celebrating their 68<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary this year.) He always tried to listen to his parents and his older brothers and sisters. Charles feels that his family served as his moral anchor while he was growing up; and that they were always there to guide and keep him out of trouble. Upon graduating from high school, Charles joined the military. Life in the military was very different than the family rules he grew up with. However, some of his friends in the military kept him in line, the same as his family used to do. As Charles states: “From age 18-30, I was always one choice away from getting into trouble. But, there was always someone around me to say, don’t do it”.

At the age of 20 while in the military Charles had a son. He attempted to pay child support but quickly fell behind. After twelve years of service he left active duty to be with his son. He had seen numerous examples in the military where fathers weren’t with their children and the problems that this caused. Not long after that he became a father again, this time with a daughter from a different mother. There he was with a son and a daughter. Charles promised he would be there physically and financially; and he knew he had to keep a job to support the mothers and his children beyond the child support payments. After all, this was taking the responsibility for his actions just as his father had taught him.

Still trying to go it alone, Charles, attempting to support a number of people, once again fell behind. Even as he watched his son graduate from high school, he knew his work was not done. Charles’ 14 year old daughter came to live with him. This was a mutual agreement between the mom and Charles because he was more accessible to the school system and had more stable transportation.

It was at this point that he decided it was time to stop going it alone and doing it all by himself. He needed and wanted help with raising his 14 year old daughter.

In 2007, Charles approached Frank Williams at Man2Man, an SCFI founding Partner, where Charles took fatherhood classes. He began to see how his continued involvement with Man2Man could become a way for him to pay it forward for all of the support he received both from family, and friends and mentors in the military. In 2010, Charles became a regular staff member at Man2Man teaching fatherhood classes and providing individualized supportive services to class participants. He has even presented at fatherhood start-up programs in Youngstown and Chicago. According to Charles “there is always somebody watching you, and they could decide to do what you are doing, therefore you should always be a good example.”

Today, Charles teaches fatherhood classes for Man2Man on Thursday evenings and Sundays. He continues to provide individualized assistance to referrals from the Child Support Enforcement Agency and the Domestic Relations Court in areas such as custody, expungement and clemency. Charles, very wisely, states: “Something changes after the first 1-2 weeks. Initially the class participants feel that their participation in classes is mandatory, but soon after that, they want to be there. You develop a bond with each class. For some of them this is their first accomplishment. You can see it in their faces!”

Charles currently has a full time job working with developmentally disabled adults. “They have disabilities, but they also have abilities that help overcome the disabilities.” His son, age 34, still works for the same employer he began with out of high school. His daughter, now age 21, works in the hospitality business.

“The fatherhood initiative is not a negative program. It’s a place where fathers can get help as well as share their success. They can either get from it, or give to it”. It is obvious that Charles has both taken much from the program and, in turn, given much back. Not only has he paid it back to Man2Man but also to his family. If, as the philosopher says, service is the rent one pays for his space on earth, then Charles continues to pay his rent forward in full.

## **Did You Know?**

**As part of its strategic plan for Outreach, SCFI is now delivering fatherhood classes and supportive services in the Twinsburg area.**

*Fathers Talks are fatherhood stories brought to you by the Summit County Fatherhood Initiative (SCFI). SCFI is a collaborative, community initiative dedicated to helping men become better fathers through programming, education and individualized services. SCFI was founded by three, prominent Summit County fatherhood service providers - Pastor Eugene Norris of Fame Fathers, Don Lykes of Fathers and Sons of Northeast Ohio, and Frank Williams of Man2Man. SCFI is supported by Akron Community Foundation, GAR Foundation, United Way of Summit County, and the County of Summit - Department of Job & Family Services. Comments or questions about this publication can be sent to Bill Macchione, [william.macchione@jfs.ohio.gov](mailto:william.macchione@jfs.ohio.gov)*