

DADS RUS

2019

The Father's Group



Prince George's County
Department of Social
Services

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I. Program Description

The Prince George's County Department of Social Services (PGCDSS) is on the move with respect to father engagement programming. The department has created a safe place for dads to share experiences, joys, and challenges with their peers while having trained staff in the room to support the group process. A number of studies reveal that caseworkers may overlook fathers in relation to their investigations and interventions regarding maltreatment. In 2017, a Father Friendly Assessment was conducted throughout the agency. Surveys were distributed to 212 staff members, 142 or 67% of the staff completed and submitted the assessment. The results revealed that the organization is neutral when it comes to serving fathers. It also highlighted that an average of 85.2 (60%) of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with serving fathers. There were 4 categories assessed. Those included Leadership Development, Organizational Development, Program Development and Community Development. A summary of the results indicate that fathers/men are welcome, however there may not be an intentional recruitment effort and/or services mandated to drive the process. It is imperative that agencies provide a father friendly environment. PGCDSS piloted a project in August 2019 to support fathers in their reunification efforts. Our first cohort of seven dads chose to name their group DadsRus. 60% of the fathers we reached out to completed the six week voluntary program. 85% of those fathers attended each week consistently. The fathers group is designed to improve the quality of father-child relationships, therefore, stabilizing and strengthening families. This allows the department to be positioned as a leader and model in the human services field. Additionally, our pilot program has provided training to over 125 PGCDSS staff persons who serve fathers in the child welfare system. Through this program PGCDSS has become more intentional and innovative as it relates to best practices to engage fathers in our county. As a result, fathers are expressing that their involvement in the program has produced better co-parenting relationships and increased abilities to effectively communicate with their female social workers. The program prepares the fathers for leadership opportunities on the job and in the community and to become mentors for other fathers in the child welfare system.

II. Families/Staff Impacted

Programming supports fathers and gives PGCDSS the tools necessary to meet the needs of fathers engaged in the reunification process. Seven fathers in our first cohort each had between two and six children that are impacted by the system. There are also countless members of their extended family and friends who are stakeholders in relation to successful reunifications and adoptions. Since the start of the program, social workers involved with the father's cases have given positive feedback on their ability to provide services and supports to the respective families. In August we began

to train our DSS staff on best practices dealing with our target population. Our program has also positively impacted families by assisting with the creation of father friendly public spaces in our buildings as it relates to the visual appearance through pictures. We are utilizing pictures that positively reflect appropriate father child relationships; it is our goal to ensure our locations become more father friendly through these visualizations that communicate our commitment to all parents. In starting this program, we have found that transportation, childcare, and food were barriers to fathers participating in our program. To alleviate some of these barriers, a healthy dinner was provided, as well as, childcare and transportation for each of the six week sessions.

III. Cost of Activity

The cost of the summer pilot project was approximately \$25,000. The projected cost of the fall session is under review at the time of this submission.

IV. Any resulting cost/time savings

Cost savings data has not yet been fully assessed at the time of this submission. Meaningful results related to consistent supervised visits, court ordered compliance towards reunification, and more productive communication and collaboration between fathers and female social workers have helped move the needle towards a team oriented approach to case proceedings resulting in greater efficiency.

V. Likelihood for replication

We are in the planning stages for the Fall 2019 program. The cohort is slated to include members from the pilot project as well as new fathers. This small group approach in providing direct intervention and mentoring supports enhanced parenting skills while navigating child welfare. This model is something that we hope to integrate into the prison system to reach incarcerated fathers, as well as, fathers throughout the county who are English language learners. It is our goal that as the program grows we will be able to engage fathers with necessary supports regardless of their involvement with the system. The pillars of our program are:

