



Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM)

Group Change Initiative Example



National Child Welfare Workforce Institute
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Acknowledgments

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WORKSHEET I: MY INITIAL CHANGE INITIATIVE PLAN

Submitted by Terry Jackson

1. Name of Change Initiative

- Enhancing Family Engagement by Expanding Father Involvement

2. Vision for Change Initiative

- Engaging Family Means Engaging Fathers

3. Brief description of Change Initiative

- Our goal is to increase meaningful involvement of absent fathers with their children and at all stages of the family's involvement with child welfare. Program components may involve outreach, education, support groups, and so forth. We have done some research and have a work group but are in the early stages of this initiative.

4. What issues in your agency and community led to selecting this topic as a Change Initiative?

- Several co-occurring circumstances led to selecting this as a focus for a systems level reform initiative:
 - a) Both our most recent Child and Family Services Review and our own internal quality assurance case review process indicate that we still have major work to do to involve parents in their own cases. This is especially true of fathers and likely even more so of absent fathers and their families.
 - b) Advocates from communities of color have told us we do not engage their families well enough in case planning and placement decisions—particularly fathers and paternal relatives.
 - c) We recently had a much-publicized case in which a father who lived out of state was unaware that his child had been removed from the child's mother's home in our state. Our attempts to locate him were determined by the Court to be insufficient, and the Court ruled that we had not made reasonable efforts (a diligent search) to find him. In so doing, we had perhaps missed an opportunity to prevent placement with a non-family member.
 - d) Several of our partner agencies have indicated an interest in offering specialized individual and group services for fathers whose children are involved in the child welfare system and have urged us to add this service to their contracts with us. (Some are already doing so on a limited basis under some general contract language about serving families.)
 - e) We have improved our success in identifying and locating absent fathers by using tools such as DMV records, but we are still not as successful as we anticipated we would be by now. Also, our efforts not only to locate and make contact with, but also to engage fathers have not been as successful as we had hoped.
 - f) Several of our staff who want us to be more father-friendly have said that we have a "culture shift" in front of us—as an agency we have been "mother-

centric”—and that there are pervasive biases against fathers that will be more apparent as we actually try to change practice.

5. What is the research or evidence behind your Change Initiative? What level of evidence exists that this intervention will meet the need?

- I perused the Internet site <http://library.childwelfare.gov>, entered “father involvement,” and found 800 sources. Narrowing the search to “child welfare involvement,” I was encouraged to see that other child welfare projects have developed absent father training/support programs and that several are being studied for effectiveness. I intend to ask a professor at our social work school for help in thinking through the application of their findings to our initiative.
- Listed below are some of the resources I found that support efforts to involve fathers in their children’s lives.
 - a) A 2009 Parade magazine article included a quotation from President Barack Obama, who wrote, “In many ways, I came to understand the importance of fatherhood through its absence—both in my life and in the lives of others. I came to understand that the hole a man leaves when he abandons his responsibility to his children is one that no government can fill. We can do everything possible to provide good jobs and good schools and safe streets for our kids, but it will never be enough to fully make up the difference. That is why we need fathers to step up, to realize that their job does not end at conception; that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child but the courage to raise one.”
 - b) *National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center—Father Involvement in Children’s Development*, <http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/fatherinvolvement.html>
 - c) *National Quality Improvement Center on Non- Residential Fathers and the Child Welfare System*, <http://www.abanet.org/child/fathers/home.shtml>
 - d) *Engaging & Involving Fathers and Paternal Family Members*, <http://www.childwelfare.gov/famcentered/casework/paternal.cfm>
 - e) *Promoting Responsible Fatherhood (US DHHS)*, <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov>

6. What is your position and span of responsibility in the agency and your role in relation to this Change Initiative?

- I am the Child Welfare Ongoing Services Manager for my agency. My span of responsibility covers all services to families once the investigation/initial assessment has been completed. This involves both in-home and out-of-home services. My agency director has asked me to spearhead this initiative, and I am committed to doing this; I see it as a critical issue.

7. What work, if any, has been done to date on this Change Initiative?

- Our director has formed a workgroup within our agency which includes several managers at my level (for investigation/initial assessment of reports, child support enforcement, and TANF) to discuss this and encourage buy-in and ideas about how to proceed.

- As a group (with the addition of several supervisors and frontline staff), we informally went through a checklist, “Father-Friendly Checkup for Child Welfare Agencies.” We found many areas where we could improve.
- I have asked our data people to identify information about our current cases, such as how many have a known father, whether a father has been contacted and engaged, how frequently there is an absent father at the time of the initial report, and so forth. (It turns out that this is not as straightforward as we thought, and so we are working on ways to clarify our data requests).
- My director met with a local ministerial alliance which contacted her about a number of issues involving Social Services (especially child welfare) and their congregations and communities. (This is where we learned of their concern about how we serve men in families of color.)
- My director and I attended a meeting of our contract service providers, and some of them brought up that they would like to serve fathers in a more formal way (such as education groups).
- We have had discussions in our agency about adding former clients to our advisory board, but we have not yet identified a process to do so.
- At this point, our interagency workgroup has identified that probably our most pressing need in terms of our cases is to locate and engage *absent* fathers and their families. In terms of system-level work, we need to do many things to make our agency and our collaborations more father friendly.
- At the case level, we have stressed the importance of identifying the names of absent fathers over the last few years (an impetus for this was capturing child support payments), and while we haven’t yet successfully mined our data about this, we think our efforts have paid off in identifying absent fathers.

8. What work is still needed; what challenges do you face; and what do you see as next steps?

- We have just begun this effort. We have a great deal to do in all of the following areas:
 - a) *Better identify what our focus is:* We think we should narrow the case-level efforts to make it manageable, and our most pressing issue seems to be absent fathers (but this is awaiting our own data—we want to review that before making a decision). On a systems level, we need to find ways to make our agency more family friendly, and this includes friendly to fathers. We need to involve families who have successfully completed their involvement with us on a variety of committees, training efforts, and so forth. We want to find out how other agencies have done this and dealt with the challenges involved. (We are reviewing literature and websites and have plans to send several people to father involvement conferences.)
 - b) *Involve a variety of our partners, both our contractors and agencies and organizations in the community that also care about involving fathers:* We want to avoid going too far down the road without their collaboration. We have been discussing how to approach this, given that we are experiencing financial cutbacks and don’t want to promise anything that we can’t deliver.

- c) *Educate and in other ways bring our own staff around to embracing this change:* There is still some resistance stemming from fears for child safety and negative attitudes about fathers in general. We may need to bring in a trainer for all of our staff.
- d) *Find common ground with the domestic violence community:* After many years of strained relationships, we now work quite closely with DV providers—and we are very concerned about how to find common ground with them on this. So, we plan to involve them soon but want to find a way to address concerns that could result from how these efforts are framed and carried out.
- e) *Engage our school of social work in helping us evaluate our efforts:* The school has helped us with other change initiatives.
- f) *Educate the community and the press:* Our community has seen a few highly publicized cases of child abuse and child deaths involving young males as perpetrators, and now there is the case where the absent father was not located. As we roll out any change effort in this area, we expect a lot of scrutiny and strongly felt and divergent opinions about what should be done and who should do it. We want to anticipate these and have a plan for responding. We hope to learn how to deal with the criticisms and attacks on the agency that come whenever we open our work up to the community. Before we formally announce a new initiative about this, we want to be better prepared to manage the inevitable debate and dialogue.