

2015 Achievement Awards Virginia Association of Counties

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2015.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

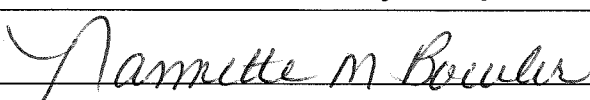
PROGRAM INFORMATION

Locality: Fairfax County
Program Title: Father Engagement Program
Program Category: Health & Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Nannette Bowler
Title: Director, Fairfax County Department of Family Services
Signature: 

2015 VACo Award Submission



Fairfax County Department of
Family Services

Father Engagement Program

12011 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, VA 22035
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www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs

Included with Entry:

- Application Form
- Program Write-Up
- Short Program Overview
- Press Summary

Fairfax County - Department of Family Services

Father Engagement Program

The Problem:

In Fairfax County and nationwide, there is often a bias toward mothers whose children are involved with the child welfare system. Fathers are sometimes an afterthought during crucial decision points and they don't always feel welcome to participate in the process. There have been instances when children have been placed in foster care instead of with their fathers, or with paternal relatives, simply because no effort was made to contact the father or it was assumed the father did not want to be involved.

The Fairfax County Department of Family Services' Children Youth and Families Division (DFS-CYF) believes that:

- Fathers are irreplaceable and play important roles in the lives of their children.
- There is a direct link between positive father involvement and child well-being and development.
- Fathers also contribute to their children's safety and permanency.
- Father inclusion leads to better outcomes for children.

The Solution: Effective and Consistent Father Engagement

In 2007, DFS-CYF created the Fairfax Fatherhood Initiative. From 2007 to 2013, with very limited staff resources, this initiative used a two prong approach to improve practice with father engagement staff training starting in 2008, and the development of father-friendly services like the Fathers in Touch (FIT) fatherhood program, which began with a pilot in 2009.

In December 2013, DFS-CYF created a new Father Engagement Unit within the Family Engagement Program to build on the successes of the Fairfax Fatherhood Initiative with a focus on systemic change. The goal of the Father Engagement Unit is to build on agency strengths (in collaboration with system of care agencies and community based-agencies) to infuse father engagement best practices throughout our

child welfare service delivery system to more effectively and efficiently address the safety, permanency, and well-being needs of children and their families.

The mission of the Father Engagement Unit is to help strengthen families by supporting and effectively engaging fathers and paternal relatives whose children are involved with DFS-CYF programs. This is accomplished through training of child welfare staff, implementation of effective engagement strategies, development of policies and practice guidelines that are father inclusive, and collaboration with systems of care agencies and community-based organizations to meet the unique needs of fathers and their families.

Services provided by the Father Engagement Unit include:

- Father Engagement training for child welfare staff
- Fatherhood classes
- Case consultation with child welfare staff on father engagement best practices
- Hand on support with father engagement on challenging cases
- “Father2Father” peer mentoring program (Pilot)
- 2 full time Father Engagement Staff.

Father Engagement Action Team (FEAT):

Supporting the Father Engagement Unit’s mission and the associated systemic change efforts is the Father Engagement Action Team (FEAT). Chartered in May 2014, members include representatives from County agencies (DFS, Neighborhood and Community Services, Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, Fairfax County Public Schools), nonprofits (Opportunities Alternatives and Resources, Fairfax Mediation Services), the Virginia Department of Social Services' Division of Child Support Enforcement, and two biological fathers whose children received CPS and foster care reunification services.

Systemic Change efforts target the following areas:

- Leadership Development

The attitudes, beliefs, and values held by the organization’s employees—the culture of the organization—and their impact on the delivery of services and programs.

- Organizational Development

The “nuts and bolts” of an organization that carries out its mission through organizational capacity as reflected in areas such as: 1) policies and procedures, 2) processes, and 3) physical environment.

- Program Development

The services and programs an organization offers, how it engages staff in offering them, and how it promotes and markets them.

- Community Engagement (Systems of Care)

The ability of an organization to engage its community in the delivery of services and programs.

Strategies to address areas of practice with opportunities for improvement include:

- Further defining the role of the DFS Father Engagement Unit
- Develop a policy and father engagement best practices manual
- Provide ongoing father engagement staff trainings
- Enhance existing and develop new father-friendly programs

Father Friendly Program Highlights:

Staff Training:

Engaging Fathers 101 - Since 2008, DFS has trained nearly 350 child welfare professionals in Fairfax as well as staff from neighboring jurisdictions, Court Appointed Special Advocates, and Head Start

programs. In 2015, engaging fathers trainings were opened up even more to non DFS staff to include other Systems of Care agencies like Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court Services (Supervised Visitation programs), Community Services Board (Infant and Toddler Connection of Fairfax - Falls Church), private nonprofit therapeutic foster care agencies, and community based housing programs.

Father-Friendly Programs:

The Fathers In Touch Fatherhood Program (FIT) was first piloted in 2009. Since that time, DFS has worked in collaboration with the Capital Youth Empowerment Program, Inc. to serve more than 130 fathers, who graduated from the 12-week program. The Fathers In Touch Fatherhood Program uses the “24/7 AM Dad” curriculum developed by the National Fatherhood Initiative and a team of nationally and internationally recognized fathering experts and fatherhood practitioners. 24/7 Dad provides the around-the-clock support every father needs regardless of race, ethnicity, or economic status.

The majority of fathers enrolled in this program are referred by DFS-CYF child welfare staff. Referrals are also accepted from DFS partner agencies. Upon graduation, fathers remain connected with their peers through monthly father-child activities that include field trip to the Zoo, local parks, museums and seasonal fishing trips.

According to DFS-CYF child welfare staff, fathers enrolled in this program have shown a significant increase in positive involvement with their children, and have been more actively engaged in service planning and decision making for their children.

The Father2Father Peer Mentoring Program serves fathers whose children are involved in the child welfare system. The program aims to provide fathers between the ages of 18-35 fatherhood role modeling, guidance, and the feeling of connectedness to another father. Developed by and housed in the Father Engagement Unit, this program works in collaboration with DFS-CYF Volunteer and Partner Services to offer the mentees one on one time with an experienced father. Father2Father mentors model self-awareness, self-care, problem solving skills, and relationship skills.

DFS-CYF began piloting this new program in August 2014 and is currently recruiting new mentors. The father of a young child currently enrolled in this program speaking at a recent Fairfax volunteer recognition event said the following: “before meeting my mentor, I did not trust social workers because I grew up in the child welfare system as a child. Now I feel differently... my mentor is like the uncle I never had.”

Conclusion

The DFS-CYF Father Engagement Program’s successful efforts to ensure father inclusion over the last eight years exemplifies what is possible with limited resources, public-private partnerships, collaboration with system of care agencies, true innovation, and an agency’s passion and dedication to the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in Fairfax County.

Fairfax County - Department of Family Services

Father Engagement Program

Short Program Overview

The Fairfax County Department of Family Services' Children Youth and Families Division (DFS-CYF) believes that:

- Fathers are irreplaceable and play important roles in the lives of their children.
- There is a direct link between positive father involvement and child well-being and development.
- Fathers also contribute to their children's safety and permanency.
- Father inclusion leads to better outcomes for children.

To support these beliefs, the Department of Family Services created the Father Engagement Program.

The mission of the Father Engagement Program is to help strengthen families by supporting and effectively engaging fathers and paternal relatives whose children are involved with DFS-CYF programs. This is accomplished through training of child welfare staff, implementation of effective engagement strategies, development of policies and practice guidelines that are father inclusive, and collaboration with systems of care agencies and community-based organizations to meet the unique needs of fathers and their families.

Fairfax County - Department of Family Services

Father Engagement Program

Press Summary

The Fairfax County Department of Family Services created the Father Engagement Program with the belief that fathers are irreplaceable and play important roles in the lives of their children. The program is further grounded in the beliefs that there is a direct link between positive father involvement and child well-being and development, that fathers also contribute to their children's safety and permanency and father inclusion leads to better outcomes for children.

The program supports these beliefs through training of child welfare staff, implementation of effective engagement strategies, development of policies and practice guidelines that are father inclusive, and collaboration with systems of care agencies and community-based organizations to meet the unique needs of fathers and their families.